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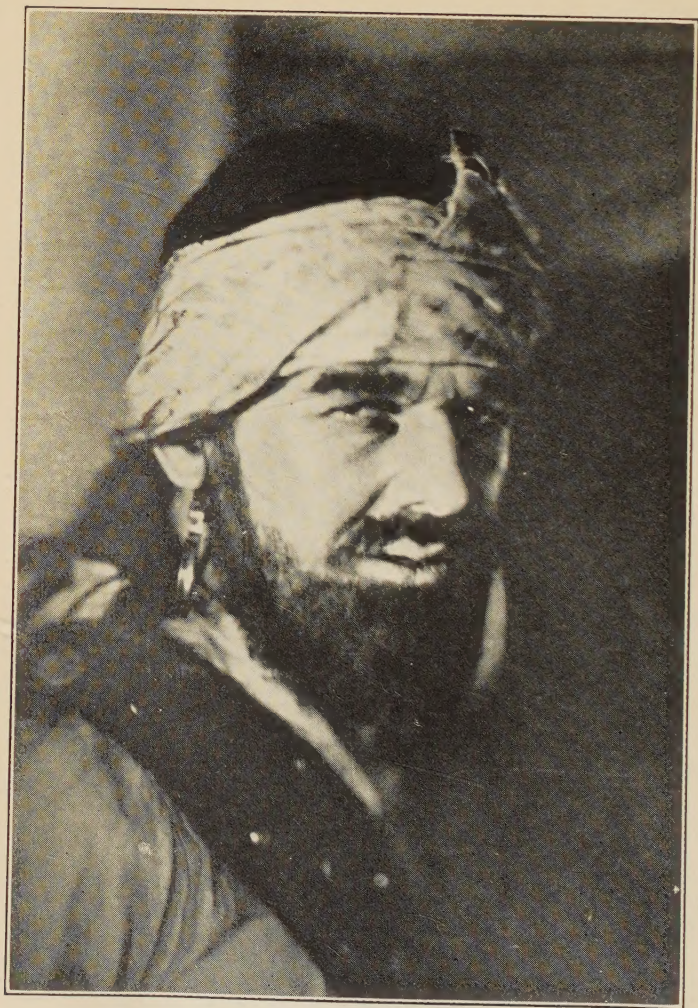
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HANDS, the mate, (Allan McGhee) in *Blackbeard*.

THE LORD'S WILL

AND OTHER CAROLINA PLAYS

By

PAUL GREEN

*Illustrated from the photographs of the original
productions of the plays*

WITH A FOREWORD BY
FREDERICK H. KOCH
Founder of
The Carolina Playmakers



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1925

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To
HENRY HORACE WILLIAMS
TEACHER

Smith 6928

JUL 11 1941

AUTHOR'S NOTE

To Professor Frederick H. Koch, the inspiring founder and director of The Carolina Playmakers, I am indebted for the privilege of including in this volume the following plays—"The Lord's Will," "Old Wash Lucas," "Blackbeard," "The Old Man of Edenton," and "The Last of the Lowries." These plays were written in Professor Koch's course in Dramatic Composition at the University of North Carolina and were copyrighted and first produced by The Carolina Playmakers at Chapel Hill, North Carolina. "The No 'Count Boy" was first produced by the Chicago Studio Players and later by the players of The Dallas Little Theatre at Wallack's Theatre in their successful competition for the Belasco cup, May 1925.

P. G.

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The illustrations for all the plays except THE NO 'COUNT BOY are from photographs by Wooten-Moulton, New Bern, N. C., of the original productions of the plays by The Carolina Playmakers, Chapel Hill, N. C.

The illustration for THE NO 'COUNT BOY is from a photograph by Rabinovitch, 25 West 50th Street, New York City.



PAUL GREEN

Paul Green is a trail-breaker in the literature of the South.

Born on a farm in Harnett County in Eastern Carolina, he is as much a part of North Carolina as the soil from which he springs. His plays are as indigenous as the pine tree to his sand-hills. Like the tree his roots strike deep. And from the raw materials of the land he draws forth the life itself in authentic folk-plays. I recall an incident which will illustrate the point. After a performance of *Old Wash Lucas* (originally *The Miser*) on one of our Playmakers' state tours, a man in the audience said to me, "I know every member of that family; it's all true."

I remember when young Green returned from the war to his studies—in the fall of 1919. The war had made a deep impression on him, and the first play he wrote in the University playwriting course was a transcript of his own experience in the trenches of France. Then came the first play to be produced by our Carolina Playmakers—*The Last of the Lowries*,

a romantic tragedy of the Croatan outlaws of Robeson County, drawn from materials familiar to him since his earliest childhood. The play stirred the audience strangely. Here was a sound artist,—a new playwright of tragic power and poetic impulse.

A man of imagination, with a strong yearning for beauty, the glamour and adventure of old tales find colorful expression in his plays. And there is a lyric note too, intrinsic in Green's dramatic writing—as in the weird strains of the pirate chantey of Bloody Ed in the *Blackbeard* play, and in the strange music of the white lady at the spinet in *The Old Man of Edenton*. None the less is this true of his starkly realistic drama—a drama of repressed yearnings and of bitter revolt. The twilight singing of the field hands in the bleak tragedy of the tenant-farm preacher in *The Lord's Will*, and the songs of the "young folks enjoyin' themselves on Christmas Eve" in *Old Wash Lucas*, translate the neglected lives of the drab scene to the serene rhythm of art.

Paul Green is profoundly interested in the creation of a Negro Theatre. I think he is the foremost worker in this field today. Such plays as *White Dresses*, *Sam Tucker*, *The End of the Row*, *The Hot Iron* and *The No 'Count Boy* have made a distinctive contribution to our contemporary drama. They reveal an almost uncanny insight into the character of the negro and a rare feeling for the imagery and the melody of his race life.

It is the hope of The Carolina Playmakers that

other groups may find and may cherish young playwrights who will express in fresh dramatic forms the life of their own localities as Paul Green has interpreted the life of North Carolina. In some such way as this we may all have a part in the making of a new drama which will reveal to us and to others those things which are "rich and strange" and of enduring value.

FREDERICK H. KOCH.

CHAPEL HILL, N. C.,
June 14, 1925.

THE LORD'S WILL¹

A Tragedy of a Country Preacher

¹ Copyright, 1922, by The Carolina Playmakers, Inc.

THE LORD'S WILL

CAST OF CHARACTERS

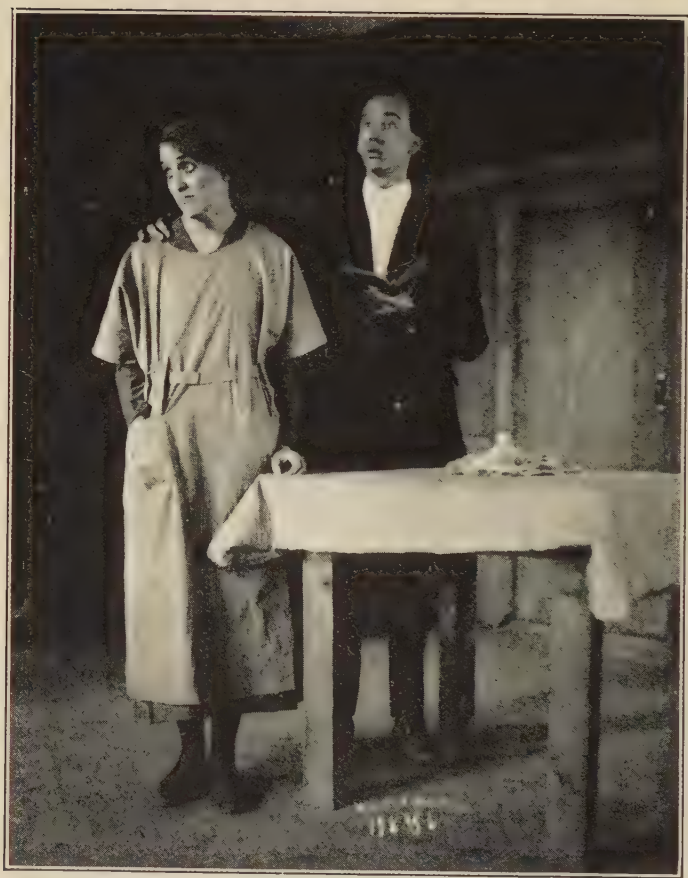
*As originally produced by The Carolina Playmakers
at The Play-House, Chapel Hill, North Carolina,
March 10 and 11, 1921.*

LEM ADAMS, *a country preacher and tenant farmer*,
Hubert Heffner
MARY, *his wife*, Katherine Galloway Batts
MRS. JONES, *wife of the farm owner*,
Katherine Woodrow

SCENE: A North Carolina tenant farm home.

TIME: The present, the late afternoon and evening of
an autumn day.

Dougald MacMillan, Assistant Director



Scene from *The Lord's Will*. MARY ADAMS (Katherine Batts) and
LEM ADAMS (Hubert Heffner).

LEM: "And He alone knows how I love Him!"

SCENE

THE scene is laid in the kitchen-dining room of the Adams home, a home typical of the tenant farmer class. It is weather-boarded on the outside, with rough joists and rafters showing inside. In the center is a table covered with striped oil-cloth. Two or three splint-bottomed chairs are set around it. Directly behind the table is a child's high chair. At the right front is a stove with a fire going, and beside it a wood-box. Through the rear center wall a door leads into a shed room, to the right of which is a window. To the left rear are a cupboard and a flour barrel. Near the center of the left wall a door opens to the outside. On a string behind the stove dish-cloths hang drying. At the right a door leads into a bedroom. Between this door and the window at the rear hang several old coats, a shawl and two or three ragged hats. An old organ is beside the door.¹ Near the right front is a large homemade chest.

When the curtain rises, MARY ADAMS is at the table ironing on a spread-out quilt. Through the window at the rear the sun can be seen setting behind a wide cotton field fringed in by trees glowing with autumn color. Beyond the rim of the woods a country church with

¹ The organ is not absolutely necessary in staging the play. Lem can sing from his hymn-book alone.

its surrounding tombstones stands white on the hill. Somewhere far off a dog barks. Then there is the rattle of a wagon and the sound of the driver hurrying on his team. A great gap of silence hushes these sounds, and nothing is heard except the slipping of the iron on the clothes and the sudden "blump" as MARY sets it on the holder to turn the garment.

MARY is a thin-chested woman about twenty-five years old, tall and pale of face, yet retaining a sort of wistful beauty. Her dress is poor but clean. Her eyes are red and dark-circled with weeping and sleeplessness.

Lazily and clear from the cotton fields on the creek rises a song:

"They'll be no stranger there,
They'll be no stranger there,
I'll take my golden rocking-chair
To the River and set down.

"Look up, look up that lonesome road,
Where me and my pardner's got to go——"

The day's work is done, and the negroes, with their cotton weighed up, are going home.

MARY stops ironing and, holding the iron in her hand, listens with something of a rapt expression on her face. She goes to the window and stands looking out at the cold streaks of the sunset. Fainter and farther away comes a single negro's voice yodeling high in the gathering dusk. "O——ee! O——ee! Hi—yo—o-o-o——ee!" It too passes out of hearing. She turns

from the window with a sigh. In a childish sort of helplessness she brushes her hand across her forehead and into the hair loosely done up at the back of her head. She returns to the table, sets the iron down, and takes up the garment which she has been ironing. It is a child's dress, suitable for a girl of four or five. Placing a chair near the stove, she hangs the dress on it and begins ironing another.

The sound of a childish rattling cough comes from the room at the rear. MARY drops her iron and hurries quietly through the door, leaving it ajar. The indistinct outlines of a low wooden bed are seen. The spell of coughing passes, the words "My precious!" are heard, and MARY comes back into the room. Closing the door softly behind her, she stands wiping the tears from her eyes. Then she clasps her hands and lifts her head as if to pray. But a look of rebellion comes over her face. Vehemently she throws her hands apart.

Footsteps are heard coming up the porch. She starts impetuously toward the door, but stops and goes slowly back to her work.

MRS. JONES comes in at the left. She is a stout woman about forty, dressed in a cheap dark dress, bare-headed, and puffing with the exertion of walking. She is carrying food on a tray with a napkin spread over it. For a moment she stands just inside the door as if undecided as to what to do.

MARY

(*In surprise*)

Why, Mis' Jones, I thought it was——

MRS. JONES

Never mind, Mary, I just stepped over for a minute. (*She comes toward the table.*) Was you expecting somebody else?

MARY

It's about time for Lem to be coming. I thought it was him.

MRS. JONES

(*Somewhat laconically*)

Yes, Lem!

MARY

But come in and take a seat. (*She places a chair for her. MRS. JONES puts the tray on the table.*) I shore am surprised to see you.

MRS. JONES

Well, it's a sort of surprise to me. But I'd cooked up some different things for supper; and a-setting there waiting for John to come from the gin, I thought I'd run down here and bring something. Perhaps Ruth could drink a little of the chicken soup, and maybe you'd like a piece of fruit cake yourself. (*She turns towards MARY and looks around the room.*) Where is she? She ain't bad off enough to be in bed, is she?

MARY

I don't know—she's in there asleep. (*With a motion of her head towards the room at the rear.*) Yis-

tiddy she said she wanted to lay down. (*After a moment.*) Maybe she's better there in bed.

MRS. JONES

(*Looking rather directly at MARY and then away*)

I reckon so. Guess you know best. (*She uncovers the food.*) This is shore-'nough cake, Mary, if I did make it myself. It's got some of John's scuppernong wine in it I snitched from the bottom of his trunk.

MARY

(*Gazing hungrily at the food and then turning off*)

You're mighty good, Mis' Jones. Set down and rest.

MRS. JONES

(*Blowing her nose in her apron*)

No, no. Lord help my life. I got to be hitting the grit in a minute. John'll be home after while and want his supper. And Dick's there waiting for hisn. You know how men folks is. And John's on the puny list too. (*MARY replenishes the fire from the wood-box.*)

MARY

Oh, set down, Mis' Jones—if you can spare the time.

MRS. JONES

Wisht I could, but there's my greens I left a-cooking. The thrasher's coming tomorrow and they'll be a passel of hands to feed. But—there I go about my fixings. How's the child tonight?

THE LORD'S WILL

MARY

(With a troubled look)

I don't know. This morning she seemed to be better, but about five o'clock she tuck to coughing worse'n usual. Onct or twice she had a spell of choking with the phleagm. I—I—oh, I don't know how she is. *(She goes to the window.)* Take a seat.

(MRS. JONES stands watching her. MARY turns from the window, puts the iron back on the stove, folds the quilt up and places it in the chest along with the dress. Then she lights the lamp and sets it on the table.)

MRS. JONES

The soup'll soon be cold. You reckon you'd better see if she'll drink some now? *(Accusingly.)* Is that her coughing so? *(As the child coughs.)*

MARY

(In alarm)

Yes, but I—I think she'll be all right soon. Shore 'nough she ain't bad off. *(MRS. JONES starts toward the door.)* Better not go in. She's sleeping now. And the soup can warm on the stove. We sure appreciate it. If you hadn't brought the soup and cake I hardly know what we'd 'a' done—for supper. *(She sighs.)*

MRS. JONES

There, there. Don't go taking on so. I ain't done nothing for you but what I ought. It ain't more'n

human for folks to help each other out in spells of trouble.

MARY

Yes, but—I didn't think—and the way things has turned out!

MRS. JONES

Now, now, that's all right. I have been hopping mad about the way Lem's done, but—well, just because you live on our land ain't no reason we can't be neighbors. You know, Mary, we'd ought to sorter pull together.

MARY

Yes, oh, yes, we had ought.

MRS. JONES

And if John does stay mad about the way Lem's done him, it don't mean that I can't be kind to his wife and baby, does it?

MARY

But Mr. Jones, he don't feel for—oh, I reckon women folks hadn't ought to fall out when they men can't gee horses—and I'm thankful for——

MRS. JONES

Yes, yes, and soon as Sue told me this evening about Ruth being sick, I thought I'd better fix some soup and bring her. (*Impulsively.*) 'Tain't as if I had a house-

ful of little uns of my own, Mary. And you know Ruth sorter tuck to me the time you was at your daddy's nussing the fever.

MARY

That's so. She loves you about as much as she does me. She takes natural to most everybody.

MRS. JONES

Now you see, I wanted to. And besides it's my duty.

MARY

Yes, but they's plenty of folks in this world don't do they duty.

MRS. JONES

That they is. And one of 'em don't live far from here neither.

MARY

(Turning quickly toward her)

Don't, Mis' Jones. Don't start on that. He ain't never said a harm word ag'in' Mr. Jones.

MRS. JONES

I reckon not. *(She shivers.)* Well—I feel a draught from som'ers. I got hot digging across the plowed ground, and now I'm about to have the shivers. *(She looks around at the unceiled room.)* Mary, tell me, you reckon she caught that cold on account of this house being so airish?

MARY

I think not. 'Tis terribly cold, but she got the starting of it last week. That cold day, the Saturday Mr. Matthews killed hogs, I washed up Lem's clothes for the meeting at Prospect Church; and she kept playing around the pot in the cold. I tried to git Lem to keep her in the house with him, but he was reading the Bible and working at his sermons. He didn't have no time to fool with her he said. That night she was all stopped up. And she's been gitting worse ever since.

MRS. JONES

(Explosively)

Well, I never in all my born days! There—again, always—but—(*Seeing Mary's accusing face*)—I was sorter afraid she'd caught it all from the openness here. I been after John to ceil the house before the roaring gusts sets in, but (*stopping*) somehow he won't take much stock in doing it. (*MARY sits down at the table resting her chin in her hand.*)

MARY

I know, I know. Set down.

MRS. JONES

Well, I will a minute. (*She sits.*) Don't notice what I said. They's more ways than one to git a house ceiled, and I reckon I'll see to it or break a trace. (*Sympathetically.*) Must be powerful lonesome here at times, ain't it?

THE LORD'S WILL

MARY

(Persistently)

I know the reason he won't ceil the house. It's account of Lem, ain't it?

MRS. JONES

Well, I do say! How come you to think of such a thing? I never said a word about it.

MARY

But that's just the reason, ain't it? He don't want us another year.

MRS. JONES

Aw, Mary, don't go digging up trouble before your joy's spread.

MARY

(Bitterly)

I know, though. He's goin' to git niggers to move in next year and plant a lot of cotton. Sue come from the cotton patch this evening to git a drink of water, she said, but it was just to tell me that Mr. Jones had rented to them another year.

MRS. JONES

(Wrathfully)

The black hussy! What's she talking to you like that for! You just let her come back to pick cotton a-Monday and I'll make her cut a dido for that very thing.

MARY

Oh, I don't blame him for wanting to git rid of us, with nobody to work. There's our cotton standing in our field not touched except for the little dab I picked. And I ain't picked none since Ruth was tuck.

MRS. JONES

(Taking out her snuff-box)

Mary, it ain't that I blame you. You've done your level best. But—*(blurting out)*—Lem's jest no 'count for farm work.

MARY

(Wearily, without seeming surprised)

Maybe not. He's plumb carried away with his preaching. Says that's what he's made for. And—you know the way he feels about it.

MRS. JONES

It may be what he's made for. But he told John, when he come to rent from him, that he'd let preaching go and count his crop first. And look what he's done. A quair thing when preachers can't tell the truth. *(Scornfully.)* Been off to tent meetings, and holding revivals and brush meetings every since last July. And here it is the first of November with just a day now and then at home. Never got all his fodder pulled even. Left it all for you to do.

MARY

Don't blame him, Mis' Jones. You can't understand how much his preaching means to him. He's just filled

up with it. You know he's good to me in his way. I understand him. But his religion's everything to him, it is that.

MRS. JONES

(Resolutely calming down and taking snuff)

Well—but anyhow people has different ideas on that. Have some snuff?

MARY

(Looking at her hungrily as she lifts a huge brushful to her mouth)

I'd be plumb glad to, but I quit it long ago. Lem said 'twon't right to dip, and so I ain't teched it since we was married. *(Leaning forward.)* That smells like Sweet Scotch, is it?

MRS. JONES

(Holding the box toward her)

Yes, that's the kind 'tis—good too.

MARY

It's what I used to dip.

MRS. JONES

Then try a dust of it. Lem won't know. *(With a sudden thought.)* Now if John Jones'd try to stop me from my snuff I'd——

MARY

(Pushing the box from her)

But he ain't like Lem. You can reason with Mr.

Jones. And he kinder lets you have your way at times. But they's something slow and awful in the way Lem does things. You couldn't go ag'in him. He used to chew tobacco, but on the road one day God told him to quit it. And he ain't never had none in his mouth since.

MRS. JONES
(*Bursting out*)

There you go, Mary Adams! You're a plumb fool to be belly-banged around the way Lem Adams does you. Set here and eat your heart out from pure lonesomeness, not a ray of pleasure in the world. And he off preaching trying to save souls. He'd better sight be here saving his crop. (*With gathering wrath.*) He ain't even been here since Ruth got sick, I bet you on it.

MARY

She ain't been sick long. I sent word by Mr. Matthews this morning that she had a cold. The meeting breaks today and he'll be shore to come home tonight. I been expecting him all the evening. I thought at first that you was him.

MRS. JONES

It's his own good time he'll take leaving that meeting. Oh Lord, child, I'm sorry for you. My man's hard enough to endure, but if I was tied—don't look at me that way, for I'm going to say it—Yes sirree, if I'd married a spindle-shanked fool like that, always dribbling gospel from his jaws—oh, I'd been in the asylum long ago. Cussing and fighting is better'n too

much praying for me. (*Her snuff-brush works up and down with excitement. MARY rises from her seat.*) And what's any of it worth? Far as I can see—and God'll forgive me for saying it—far as I can see, his preaching ain't worth a cent. He might as well spend his time catching doodles. Yes, I do mean it! (*She also rises from her seat. MARY turns from her in pain.*) He ain't fit for nothing but to stake out cows. Here he goes up and down the country roaring out the word of God, and he might as well be on a hill in a dark night calling *cooshy, cooshy* to a dead sheep. Suit him better—and he a treating you like pizen.

MARY

(*Half in tears*)

You hadn't ought to——

MRS. JONES

(*Continuing*)

I ain't never heard him preach but once, thank God! And I didn't understand a word he said, and I don't believe he did. The way he throwed his hands around in the air made me think of my old cat the day he got caught in a whirlwind of sand. (*She stops for lack of breath.*) But, oh, Lord, what's the use of my preaching too. And you, a-standing there, pale and plumb wore out.

MARY

(*Turning on her in sudden rage*)

Stop that! You ain't got no right to run him down behind his back. (*Half sobbing.*) You're trying to

tear up my belief in him. But he'll show you all some day what a man he is. He's got a great work to do. I married him believing in him, and I'll keep on till everybody puts confidence in what he's trying to do.

MRS. JONES

(Sadly, sympathetic, but firm)

What he's trying to do! He ought to be here trying to take care of his family.

MARY

Oh, it's been hard, lonesome—doing without enough to eat even, working my fingers to the bone, believing in him, trusting in him, knowing that some these days it'd come all right and folks'd see in Lem what I see in him. But—now—— *(She looks at the floor to hide her tears.)*

MRS. JONES

There, there, Mary. Don't. *(Blowing her nose.)*
I—I shore sympathize with you.

MARY

(Wildly)

Don't keep on telling me how sorry you are for me and what a hard time I have in this world. Don't I git to the place sometimes I can't hardly stand it? If I hadn't had Ruth I'd done been raving distracted. *(She goes to the window and looks out. Several negroes are passing the road singing . . . a medley of high-keyed women's and low husky men's voices—mingled into a far-away harmony—*

THE LORD'S WILL

(“We are climbing Jacob’s Ladder,
We are climbing Jacob’s Ladder,
We are climbing Jacob’s Ladder,
Soldiers of the Cross.

(“We will wear them golden sandals,
We will wear them golden sandals,
We will wear them golden sandals,
Soldiers of the Cross.”

(An expression of almost delight comes over her eager face. The singing passes down the road dying into a faint wisp of song. . . .

(“Soldiers of the Cross.”)

MRS. JONES

(Casually)

That’s purty, ain’t it?

MARY

(Almost in awe and forgetful for a moment)

Ain’t it! And don’t it make you think of sorter way-off things—with the sky so glowsy and cold and everything so still-like. *(She glances shyly at MRS. JONES.)*

MRS. JONES

(A little gruffly)

Them lazy niggers! They’ll chouce you out’n a piece of meat and a peck of meal slicker’n nothing, talking of how po’ly they’s getting along, and go home at night singing all the way like you hear ’em there. They don’t feel trouble no more’n goats.

MARY

Yes, but they ain't no telling what they's remembering back of all they's singing. (*A tear slides down her cheek.*)

MRS. JONES

(*Embarrassed*)

Don't—don't let a little music make you babyish.

MARY

That there music sorter makes me think of all I've wanted and ain't never had—and——

MRS. JONES

Oh, Mary, don't carry on so—and be foolish now. (*She stops, at a loss as to what to do.*)

MARY

(*Growing calm again and speaking dully*)

Oh, well, they ain't a bit of use of complaining. (*In a queer abstracted fashion she begins picking at her finger nails, now and then wringing her hands together.*) But Lem keeps saying put all your troubles on the Lord and if you want anything to ask for it. He seems to understand it all. But everything is numb and cold when I pray. I ain't never had no prayer answered. Lem says I ain't never been changed from nature to grace.

MRS. JONES

Changed! The idea!

MARY

It's all a mystery to me. I can't understand it. (*Helplessly.*) But he seems so certain about it all. He don't even git worried no more—says the Lord's tuck away his troubles. (*The child has another coughing spell.*)

MRS. JONES

Let me go to her. She's coughing.

MARY

(*With her hand on the door latch*)

I'll 'tend to her. She may just be restless in her sleep. And one she ain't used to might wake her. (*She passes through the door. The rattling breathing of the child is heard more distinctly.* MRS. JONES raises her head quickly with a sharp movement of uneasiness. MARY comes back into the room, her face even more haggard than before. She closes the door softly.)

MRS. JONES

(*Catching Mary by the shoulders*)

Look here. Why didn't you let me know how sick that child was? From the way she's breathing she's——

MARY

(*Frantically catching her hands*)

Tell me, tell me! She ain't real sick, is she? No, no! What you mean! They can't be no danger, can they!

MRS. JONES

(Pushing her firmly down in a chair)

Set still, Mary, and I'll go in and see her. No, I won't wake her. *(As MARY starts to interpose.)* They mayn't be nothing much to matter. *(Her face belies her words. She goes into the room. MARY rises and follows her with her eyes, clasping and unclasping her hands, and looking around the room as if pursued by a nameless fear. MRS. JONES reappears in the door. MARY runs to her, frightened by what she sees in her face.)*

MARY

Oh, Mis' Jones!

MRS. JONES

Child, child, why didn't you let me know? She's burning up with a fever.

MARY

I knowed she's awful warm, but I didn't think it was wors'n croup.

MRS. JONES

Croup! She's got pneumony in both sides, bless God, if I'm any judge.

MARY

(Fear blanching her face)

Pneumony! But they ain't no danger, is they? Oh, they ain't! *(Looking at her beseechingly.)*

MRS. JONES

They may be. We got to git a doctor quicker'n that. I'll run home and hurry Dick to Dr. McKay's. And he'll be here in no time. Oh, why didn't you let me know? (*MARY stands at the stove with a lost look on her face.*) What sort of medicine you been giving her?

MARY

(*Coming to with a start*)

You, you know Lem don't believe in medicine. (*Wildly.*) I prayed and prayed for her all last night and all day yistiddy. But it don't do no good. Lem says you must have faith.

MRS. JONES

(*Exasperated to the limit*)

Faith! Lord 'a' mercy! Here, I'll kite across the fields and send for the doctor. Then I'll come right back. Don't be uneasy now.

MARY

No, no. Lem won't have no doctor. It's ag'in' his religion. You know that.

MRS. JONES

It may be ag'in' his religion, but it ain't ag'in' common sense. (*Taking a salve box out of her pocket.*) I brought some pneumony cure with me. Git a piece of flannel and we'll fix a poultice quick. (*MARY goes hesitatingly towards the chest. The sound of a buggy is heard outside.*)

MARY

I can't do it. There's Lem now, I believe. Somebody must 'a' brought him from the meeting.

MRS. JONES

Go at the door and see if it is. (*She rummages around in the chest.*)

MARY

(*At the door*)

Lem!

A VOICE

(*Replying from the outside*)

All right, Mary. I'll be there in a minute.

MRS. JONES

It's him, ain't it? (*She lets the lid fall with a bang. MARY closes the door.*) Well, it won't do to have no trouble with him now, Mary.

MARY

(*Somewhat hopefully*)

Maybe Lem can—oh, maybe he can——

MRS. JONES

Maybe nothing. You can believe in prayer if you want to. But you just do what I tell you. Don't say nothing to Lem about how sick Ruth is till I git back. We'll have the doctor then and let him do his do when he comes. If you'd let him git in there to her now, he'll

like as not pray over her so loud he'd bring the death sweat on her from pure fear. Now keep him from her if you have to scratch his eyes out.

(She hurries out through the door at the left and is heard greeting LEM as he comes up the walk. MARY straightens up, wipes her eyes, hurriedly tidies the room, goes to the stove and replenishes the fire, through every motion acting like one numbed with the horror of the news she has just heard.)

The last faint streak of day has died out. Now and then a stray negro going home from the cotton fields can be heard far away giving his holler. MARY goes to the cupboard and brings out some cold food. She breaks off a piece of the cake and nibbles at it hungrily. The remainder she puts back in the cupboard.

LEM ADAMS, about forty years old, tall and stoop-shouldered, enters carrying a small ill-looking handbag made of imitation leather and split at the sides. He wears cheap clothes, rough shoes, a derby hat, home-laundered collar without a tie.)

LEM

(In a voice hoarse from the week's preaching)

Well, how you been, Mary? *(He looks at her kindly.)*

MARY

All right, I reckon. Supper's about ready. *(He hangs his hat up and starts through the door at the*

rear. MARY calls out sharply, but half-afraid.) Don't go in there. Ruth's asleep. You mustn't wake her. Please don't. (LEM slowly sets his bag down and turns towards MARY. His face is ignorant and kind. There is a deadly sort of seriousness, a powerful will shown in his every action and word. He has the way of a man absorbed in the power of a belief or idea.)

LEM

Yes, I'd forgot about Ruth. Brother Matthews told me she had a bad cold. How's she tonight? (*Without waiting for her reply, he opens his satchel and takes out a well-worn Bible.*)

MARY

(*Bringing out knives and forks*)

She's better now, I think. Anyhow she's asleep. (*He lays the Bible on the table, buttons up his coat, the sleeves of which are far too short for his arms, and goes over to the stove.*)

LEM

(*Rubbing his hands together*)

It's going to be cold tonight, and think of the poor suffering homeless ones with no place to lay their head. We sure ought to be thankful that we're living in peace here, keeping our health and strength. (*Stands musing.*) I's sorter surprised to see Mis' Jones. What'd she want?

THE LORD'S WILL

MARY

(Wiping a plate with a dishcloth)

Nothing, she just come down to see how we're making out.

LEM

I thought she'd been a-giving you a piece of her mind about me. She's a right good woman if she won't so wild in her talk. But, Mary, it's set forth plain as light concerning them as talks about they neighbors the way she does. Sometimes—— *(Hurriedly.)* I don't mean no harm by saying that either. *(MARY stands near the door to the sick-room, as if listening for the child's breathing.)* You say the baby's gittin' 'long better?

MARY

(Coming towards the stove)

I think she's better.

LEM

When'd she begin to mend?

MARY

(Calculating)

She must have had a change this evening about five o'clock.

LEM

(His voice thrilling)

It was just about that time, Mary, as I was coming along the road I felt a strong desire to pray for her.

And right there on my knees I asked the Lord to do as He saw best. And He's seeing fit to restore her to health. Few knows the power of prayer. (MARY *impulsively starts to reply, but controls herself.*)

MARY

Yes. Oh, yes, I hope so.

LEM

(*Earnestly, with a worried note in his voice*)

Hope? It ain't hope that saves, Mary, it's faith—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you could have seen what faith did in our meeting! Old Miss Campbell, who's been crippled for five long years, is walking about tonight because she had faith—faith in our prayers for her. Walking, Mary, walking! Praise His name!

MARY

Yes,—faith. (*Bursting forth.*) But I ain't got no faith.

LEM

What?

MARY

(*Frightened*)

No, no. I mean it's so awful hard to—to have faith.

LEM

Yes, that's so. You sorter scared me at first with that wild talk. It made me think of your pa, and he such a cussing man, and how you's raised in the times

back there before I married you. (*More kindly.*) But you know what it says about it. (*He throws his long right arm out in a gesture.*) Repentance, saith the Lord.

MARY

Better eat your supper, Lem.

LEM

(*Quieting down*)

Mary, you're a good woman, but you ain't reached to the state of the holy life. When you do and are redeemed, you won't have no doubts. It'll be like a stone rolled from your heart. Oh, Blessed Jesus!

MARY

(*Glancing at the door*)

Le's eat. The towel's by the stove. (LEM runs his fingers through his thin hair. He goes to a towel hanging behind the stove and gives his hands a dry wash. Then they sit down at the table.)

LEM

(*Hesitatingly*)

Ain't you going to put Ruth in her high chair?

MARY

Let her sleep. It's better.

LEM

I'd sorter like—never mind. Le's give thanks. We thank thee, our Father, for what we receive.

Make us truly thankful for all blessings, all things that come from thee. Do with us as thou seest fit. We ask thy kind mercy on the deeds done in the body. All is in thy hands. Thou givest and thou takest away. Save us—— (*Here the child begins coughing and MARY in her nervousness knocks over a cup.*) For Jesus' sake, Amen!

MARY

(*Breaking out*)

I just can't stand to hear her cough so much.

LEM

(*Speaking kindly, but rebukingly*)

You hadn't ought to break right in on the blessing like that. (*He looks at her and then at the meal before him.*) Why, where is all your supper, Mary?

MARY

I ain't got nothing but this. The flour give out two or three days ago. And—and—yes, I was about to forget a special I had for you. (*She rises and goes to the cupboard and gets the cake.*) Here's some fruit-cake. It's a sort of surprise.

LEM

(*Looking at her with a manner of affection and smiling somewhat boyishly.*)

It shore was good of you to save it for me. (*He buries his teeth in it.*) It's fine, all right. Ain't you going to eat?

THE LORD'S WILL

MARY

No, I don't want nothing. I et just before you come in. (*She goes to the stove and replenishes the fire.*)

LEM

(*Roused by the noise of the stove door and the crackle of the flames*)

Ironing ag'in, air you?

MARY

I'm trying to. They ain't been a thing ironed since you left. But the irons won't heat with nothing to burn but chips and pine bark.

LEM

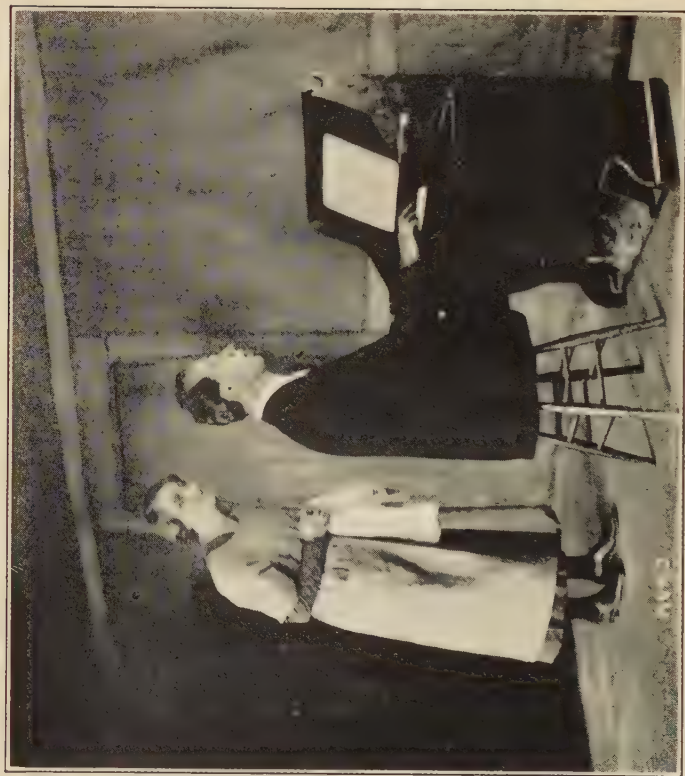
(*Rising from the table*)

I'll cut you some wood a-Monday. You ironed that streaked shirt and low collar yet?

MARY

I was just fixing to. They're out on the line now. I better git 'em. (*She goes through the door at the right. LEM finishes eating, crosses the room to the organ and sits down. Pedaling with one foot, he begins to play chords to "The Ninety and Nine." He sings:*

"There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold.
But one was out on the hills away
Far off from the gates of gold.
Away on the mountains, wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.



Scene from *The Lord's Will*. MARY ADAMS (Katherine Batts) and LEM ADAMS
(Hubert Heffner).

"Lord, whence are those blood drops all the way
That mark out the mountain track?
They were shed for one that had gone astray
Ere the Shepherd could——"

With a rush MARY comes back into the room carrying the shirt and collar. She runs to LEM and pulls at his arm.)

MARY

Lem, Lem, don't do that. Ruth can't sleep. Please quit. *(After a minute he stops playing.)*

LEM

(Turning around slowly as he closes the organ)

Oh, I forgot, Mary. But that won't wake her, will it? And what you want her to go to sleep for right here at dark?

MARY

It might wake her. And I just got her to sleep a while ago.

LEM

(Coming towards the table)

It seems so natural to play a piece after supper that I—well, go ahead and iron them things. I'll need 'em tomorrow, if the Lord's willing.

MARY

You ain't going off to preach ag'in, are you, Lem?

LEM

Don't ask me not to, Mary.

MARY

I—I—kinder thought you'd——

LEM

(Turning away his face)

Don't start that old tale ag'in. *(He stands in silence a moment and then flames out.)* Can't you see? It's my work. *(Fiercely.)* I got to. I ain't one of them highfaluting preachers serving God for the money. I'm called to do it. They ain't no rest for me 'less I'm preaching. *(His eyes flash and he nervously clutches the Bible as it lies on the table.)*

MARY

I know. *(Somewhat timidly.)* But you——

LEM

(Hurrying on)

People don't understand me. They abuse me, talk about me, and accuse me. But let 'em talk. Didn't they persecute the Master? And He said in His Holy Writ:

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Didn't He say for us to be glad of it? For so they persecuted the prophets. And great shall be my reward in Heaven. Praise His name!

(His voice is earnest, glowing with the power

of his feeling. MARY, no longer able to contend against him, sits down, holding the ironing cloth idly in her hand. The strained and hunted look in her face grows more accentuated.

For a moment LEM stands silently looking at the Bible. RUTH coughs and struggles for breath. MARY springs to her feet and runs to the door. LEM, on whose face has come a look of pain at hearing the child cough, also starts towards the rear room.)

MARY

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Don't bother to come in, Lem. I'll just smooth out her pillow so she can sleep better. 'Tain't nothing much. (LEM seems to mistrust her and makes a move as if to go into the room. In fright MARY clutches his arm.) Let me 'tend to her. A touch of croup ain't nothing. (She pushes him from the door, and closes it behind her. LEM clearly shows that he realizes something is wrong. He falls on his knees and prays in a barely audible voice, clasping and unclasping his hands. Now and then the words, "Heal her, Lord! Heal her, Lord! if it is Thy will," are heard. As MARY comes back into the room, he rises and taking a dirty blue and white-striped handkerchief from his pocket, wipes his moist face with trembling hands.)

MARY

(Feelingly)

She's resting all right. (Loudly, as if trying to calm herself as well as LEM.) 'Tain't nothing but a bad

cold. She'll be plumb well in the morning and wanting to set in her chair.

LEM

(Visibly relieved)

I'm shore glad tain't nothing worser'n that. I wanted to come home soon's I heard about it this morning, but I couldn't leave the meeting. *(Piously.)* What a privilege it is to have a Friend who will take all our sorrows upon Him—and we can know that all things work for the good of those that love the Lord—and He alone knows how I love Him.

MARY

(Briskly)

It's all right. I been ironing a dress so me and her could go down to pa's tomorrow. Anyhow I was ironing it—and—— *(She suddenly sobs.)*

LEM

(Half amazed)

Why, what's there to be crying about? *(With a sudden light dawning on him.)* Now, if it's Ruth you're worrying about, don't you know you needn't do it? The Lord'll take care of her. He knows what is best. Put your trust in Him. *(He speaks kindly but firmly, like one reasoning with a child. With an effort MARY holds back her tears and begins clearing away the dishes. LEM picks up his Bible and sits down near the lamp. From his jacket pocket he pulls out a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles and puts them on. He begins*

thumbing the leaves of the book. MARY sits a moment as if lost in thought and then springs up suddenly, spreads the quilt back on the table, goes to the stove for the iron and begins ironing.)

LEM

We hadn't ought to worry about what we ain't got no control over. The Lord of Hosts has got this world in His keeping. Listen here. (*Reading.*)

See now that I, I am He, and there is none good besides Me. I kill and I make alive. I wound and I heal. Ain't that plain? (*He turns the leaves.*) Listen. (*Reading.*) Come and let us return unto the Lord, for He hath torn and He will heal us. He hath smitten and He will bind us up.

MARY

It might be so, yet I can't, I can't understand it. But Lem, if Ruth—if Ruth's sick tomorrow, you won't go off, will you?

LEM

I'd love to stay with her, but—— (*Closing the Bible firmly.*) You know I ain't going to let nothing stand in the way of service, Mary. I can't neglect my duty. I'll leave her in the hands of God.

MARY

(*Coming around the table towards him*)

Lem, I—I—wish you wouldn't go. It's so lonesome here. Why can't you stay at home and let the

preaching be for *one* time? (*Somewhat defiantly.*)
What's it all for anyhow?

LEM

(*More amazed*)

What you mean by saying that? Can't you understand? Mary, it's writ out as plain as it can be, and a fool, though a wayfaring man, can understand. Why, why do you act like you do? Here's the Book sent as a lamp to your feet and you won't heed it. Don't you remember He said, Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel—and whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple? (*He stands up and speaks humbly.*) I felt His power this morning in the meeting. I know He speaks through me—to help save this poor sinful world. Oh, don't tempt me from my duty!

MARY

(*With a sob in her voice*)

And what sort of people is it you preach to? All the common trash in the neighborhood. The best folks, them that has work to do, don't waste their time at meetin's when they're housing their crops.

LEM

Mary, you ought to be thankful that people is people in His sight.

MARY

(*Doggedly*)

Lem, I always let you convince me because I wanted

to believe in you. But somehow, it's changed now, and something's got to be done. For one thing, we can't live on your preaching. It takes money.

LEM

Money don't count, Mary. Wasn't He a poor man? (*Sympathetically.*) I know we have got to have some money. I'll try to fix it somehow. They took up a collection for me down at the meeting. But Brother Jenkin's family is all down with the flus, and I turned it over to them remembering it is more blessed to give——

MARY

(*Now angry*)

And here your own child sick and we with hardly a bite.

LEM

(*Trying to be patient*)

But, Mary, can't I convince you? Listen here——
(*Turning through the Bible.*)

MARY

(*Half turning upon him*)

Ain't—Oh, who could answer your scriptures!

LEM

It ain't never seemed right to think of money when serving God. Didn't He tell His disciples to take no thought of money or clothes? (*Firmly.*) Now let's have no more words about it.

MARY

(Her voice rising high and nervous)

I'm going to have it out about this preaching. *(Half sneering.)* Preaching! I heard them niggers yistiddy laughing about you being off preaching. *(Vehemently.)* They even make fun of you and your education.

LEM

(Hurt and angered, looking at her)

What ails you tonight? You ain't never talked to me this way. *(Letting his arms fall in a despairing gesture. In a hurt, proud voice.)* Them niggers laughed at me! Well it's not them I heed. And what's education got to do with it! If God wants you to preach, He'll put words in your mouth. I ain't never lacked for nothing to say.

MARY

(Hysterically)

Why? Why? But, Lem, look what you promised Mr. Jones about the crop—and——

LEM

Hush, Mary. I told you it was wrong in me to promise when I didn't know what work the Lord would call on me to do. I got forgiveness for that promise—*(Raising his hand.)*—and I'll never make another'n like it ag'in. *(Forgetting himself.)* It was all on account of you that I promised. No—no—I didn't mean that, Mary.

MARY

(With growing wrath)

Yes, account of me!

LEM

After tomorrow I am going to work on the crop, shore 'nough I will and that's a fact. They won't be much more preaching until next summer. But you ought to help me, Mary, encourage me and not do all you can to pull me down. They ain't nothing bigger than the Lord's work. Why can't it be like it was when we started out together? It's hard, I know. But I will get beyond this—and bring the people to the fold—and you shan't want, and then on to bigger things for His name's honor and glory. But I need your help, Mary, you must help me.

MARY

(Fighting to understand, and yet helplessly angry at him)

I've helped you all I can and nothing don't come of it. I reckon you wisht I was out of the way. I've always been a drawback to you.

LEM

(Contritely)

Don't say that, Mary. Let's not quarrel. We must help each other. You know we'd ought to sorter pull together.

MARY

Yes, I have been a hindrance to you and you know it. We wa'n't made for each other. We wa'n't. I love to work on the farm and live respectable and have things a woman likes. (*Recklessly.*) And you're fit for nothing but preaching and praying and reading that old Bible.

LEM

(*Horrificed*)

Mary, what you saying!

MARY

(*Her face twitching*)

I mean it! I—I hate it. Why don't you leave me, you and your scripture! I don't understand it, I—— (*Helplessly.*) Oh, everything is—in a mess! You, you, ain't got no feelings for nothing but your Jesus and God and——

LEM

(*Sternly*)

Stop that talk!

MARY

(*Crying out*)

I won't, I won't! What's He ever done for me but hurt me!

LEM

(*Thundering*)

Stop saying that!

MARY

(Sobbing)

I hate it, I hate God—all of it! *(Wildly.)* Oh, I ain't afraid of your hell fire—and brimstone and burning pit——

LEM

(In awe)

That's blasphemy. It's a wonder He don't strike you dead.

MARY

(Coming towards LEM)

I tell you they ain't no God. It's all lies and talk. He wouldn't allow things to be like this if—if——
(Her voice is lost in a senseless stammer. The terrified expression deepens on LEM's face. He moves away from her. MRS. JONES is heard coming up the steps. She hurries in out of breath. Her eyes show that she has been weeping.)

MRS. JONES

Mary, I sent for him, and he'll be right along. *(With a defiant look at LEM.)* And I brought some medicine back, too.

LEM

(Staring around him as in a dream)

What's all this mean? Is there—— *(Turning quickly towards MARY.)* Mary—Oh, Mary!—*(Suddenly from the sick-room comes a scream and the sound of the child struggling for breath, then a cry:*

"Mamma! Mamma!" *With a bound MARY is in the room and at the bed. MRS. JONES hurries after her. LEM, left alone, stands a moment as if dumb-founded, and then runs to the bedside of the child. After a moment MRS. JONES kindly leads LEM back into the kitchen. She wipes the tears from her eyes and goes back into the room. LEM mechanically twists his hands together, crying out.)*

LEM

Oh, Lord, it can't be so! It can't be so! Spare me! Spare me! *(With a hysterical cry MARY comes through the door. Her eyes are almost wild now. As she sees LEM, a look of hatred comes over her face. With a scream she throws herself at him, clutching wildly at his throat. Dazed and uncomprehending, he holds her from him.)*

MARY

It is so! It is so! She's gone—gone!

(LEM catches sight of the Bible. Eagerly he picks it up. Outside the singing of the home-going negroes can be heard.

("See them children come dressed in red,
 Don't you see?
 See them children come dressed in red—
 Must be the children what Pharyoh led.
 I got a home in the rock,
 Don't you see?")

LEM

(Half sobbing)

Mary, we still got His blessed Word with its promise. *(He looks indefinitely around the room as if seeking aid from the bare walls. Dropping the Bible, he starts toward MARY, a sob in his throat.)* We've got each other, Mary, and——

MARY

(With a great cry, her voice rising high in a crescendo of final hopeless yielding.) She's dead—dead! You hear! Ruth's dead—dead! and, oh—— *(Her voice goes out of her with a gasp. Sinking into a chair, she bursts into a wild scornful laugh. LEM, as if in a maze, brushes his hand across his forehead again and again. The singing of the negroes passes out of hearing. Suddenly she springs up and throwing back her head, cries out to the empty air.)* It's You! You! Setting up there on your golden throne! *(She begins laughing and moaning again. LEM covers his face with his arm to escape from her wrath and goes into the room at the rear and falls upon his knees by the bed. Far away a single negro's voice comes back cold and high:)*

O—ee—O—ee—O—ee!—O!

CURTAIN

BLACKBEARD ¹

A Melodrama of Pirate Days on the Carolina Coast

¹ Written in collaboration with Elizabeth Lay Green. Copyright, 1922, by The Carolina Playmakers, Inc.

BLACKBEARD

CAST OF CHARACTERS

*As originally produced by The Carolina Playmakers
at The Play-House, Chapel Hill, North Carolina,
March 10 and 11, 1921.*

BLACKBEARD, <i>the Carolina pirate,</i>	George Denny
HANDS, <i>mate on the pirate's ship,</i>	Allen McGhee
GIBBENS, <i>the boatswain,</i>	Robert Thompson
BLOODY ED, <i>tailor and cook,</i>	Anthony Combs
TONY, <i>a member of the crew,</i>	James E. Hawkins
GONGA, <i>a Portuguese Negro, a member of the crew,</i>	Frank J. Haronian

SCENE: Below and aft on board Blackbeard's ship, the
"Adventure," off Ocracoke Inlet, North Carolina.

TIME: Near dawn on a November morning, 1718.

Elizabeth Lay Green and Paul Green, Assistant Directors.

In the early part of the eighteenth century one of the most notorious sea-robbers of all time was harassing the coast of North America. His real name was Edward Teach or Thatch. But on account of his enormous beard he acquired the name of BLACKBEARD. He had come from England as a privateer in the war of



Scene from *Blackbeard*. GIBBENS (Robert L. Thompson); HANDS (Allan McGhee); TONY (James E. Hawkins), and GONGA (F. J. Haronian).

the Spanish Succession, and was first heard of as a pirate in 1716, when he began cruising among the West Indies, along the Spanish Main, and up and down the coasts of Virginia and the Carolinas. Wherever he went, terror and death followed. In order to pursue his piracies unmolested in North Carolina, he made an ally of the weak-kneed Eden, then governor of the State, who shared with him many a golden prize. For a time the pirate led a rollicking life, forcing the planters to cater to his will and exacting toll from every vessel he hailed. At last the exasperated settlers appealed to Governor Spottswood, of Virginia, who sent Captain Maynard in November, 1718, with two sloops to take the marauders dead or alive. The scene of the battle was off Ocracoke Inlet, North Carolina, where BLACKBEARD'S ship had run aground in the shallow water. In the fight the pirate was killed and his head taken back to the Virginia governor.

SCENE

THE scene is laid below and aft on BLACK-BEARD'S Pirate ship, the "Adventure." The place in which the action is carried on is about fifteen feet wide converging toward the rear with the symmetry of the ship to a width of about ten feet. In the rear center is a set of steps about four feet high leading up to a small platform built before the door that opens out on the poop deck. At the right rear and lower down is a door leading into a tiny room. At the left front is a brazier in which a small fire burns. In the center of the room is a table with a guttering candle on it. Boxes and bales of different descriptions are scattered around—the remains of a spent cargo.

The curtain rises disclosing "BLOODY ED" seated near the table at the left, sewing on a garment. As he sews, he sings a slow halting song.

In a winding shroud of green sea-weed
There many a dead man lies—
And the waves above them glitter at night
With the stare of the dead men's eyes.
No rest, no sleep, ten fathom deep
They watch with their glittering eyes.

"BLOODY ED," as he is derisively called by the crew, is a little hair-triggered, frothy-mouthed man with one eye. He is a sort of tailor and jack of all trades, given to much talk and afraid of half the things that move. All crouched over in his red and spotted shirt, spitting tobacco juice now and then on the floor, he is a forlorn figure, though the humped shadow cast on the wall by the candle is fearful and grotesque.

To the right of the table in the shadows sits "CUT-THROAT GONGA"—as he is known from Cape Henry to Rio—slumped over on a bench, his right hand on the knife in his belt. He is a powerful negro, the muscles of his arms standing out in great ropes of strength. He wears a piece of shirt, short ragged trousers, a dirty red sash, long hair partly concealed by a rag tied about his head. He also wears heavy leather bracelets on his arm and earrings in his ears. He is slumbrous-eyed, deadly, his every thought matched only by the quickness of his knife towards which his hand is always instinctively moving.

There is an air of hopelessness and despair about him. Now he sways from side to side with ED's singing, now and then taking his knife from his sheath and feeling its edge. Never once does he look up, but sits hunched over, showing only dimly the little knot of a head set between his enormous shoulders, small deep-set eyes, and huge flat nostrils. In his swaying he emits at times a sort of whining guttural melody, unlike any music or words that might be—barbaric, menacing, afraid.

BLOODY ED

(Singing)

Forever washed by the deep sea tides
With the changing coral sands,
For their treasured gold in their own deep
 graves

They search with their bony hands.
No rest, no sleep, ten fathom deep
They dig with their bony hands.

(He stops singing and laughs nervously, looking questioningly at the negro. He begins his singing and sewing again. From the door at the rear to the right comes a beating of fists against the wall and a noise like someone sobbing. GONGA stirs uneasily and whets his knife along his boot.)

BLOODY ED looks towards the door, starts to speak, but turns again to his sewing. The noise dies away to a whine and the silence falls. The wind creeps through the spars and shrouds with a flute-like wailing sound. The water goes lap, lap at the sides of the ship. BLOODY ED's song rises again with the wind. The candle flares and flickers with the draft. Shivering, he draws nearer to the light, sewing faster and changing his moaning melody into a roaring, boisterous song.)

With a wind and a blow
And the devil below
We'll scour the Spanish Main.

(He bites off a thread)

With a piece and a knife
And the sea for a wife
And an eye and a leg lost for gain——

(He sings lugubriously, looking fearfully around at GONGA and holding up a long canvas garment from his lap. He speaks.)

Aye, Gonga, things is in a bad way when a pirate what's lived in blood feels it's time to make his own shroud. (GONGA makes no reply, only that his hand flutters a moment on the hilt of his knife. After a pause BLOODY ED continues.) Aye, what a change from the old days we used to sail with Morgan through every blessed western island and lived in a flood of pieces of eight! What, Gonga! (He turns toward him and waits for a reply.) Maybe with your visions of omens and sich like ye cain't hear me.

GONGA

(Without raising his head)

Bad it be, but too late now.

BLOODY ED

Too late! aye, ye're right there—and we cooped up stranded here on a sandbar waiting to be blown through the tops'l by the King's men out there when the dawn falls. (He turns to his sewing, singing and half-mumbling.)

No rest, no sleep, ten fathom deep
They dig with their bony hands.

(Suddenly he turns towards GONGA and flares out.)
And think of the wild nights and the rum and the gaming houses of Jamaiky. We was pirates then, me son, we who knowed and fought on every bit of the Caribbees big as a shred o' sail. *(Somewhat wrathfully.)* Aye, it's so! But that was afore we sold our very souls by shipping with Blackbeard. *(Lowering his voice and speaking doggedly.)* Driv' like slaves we be, with no splitting up the spile—no gold—no nothing—no food what a dog would eat.

(His needle flies faster. The negro remains silent a moment and then rasps out.)

GONGA

Quiet, little man. Allus you talk of old times in blood. You no pirate, you coward. The captain fix you.

(He opens his mouth in a silent laugh, disclosing two long teeth. BLOODY ED makes an angry movement towards his knife. GONGA pays no attention to him.)

BLOODY ED

Coward! Coward! Me a coward? Fine time, me purty, for you to talk o' cowards and ye a-seeing horrors in the sun setting behind the enemies' ships out there. *(GONGA shivers slightly and turns away from BLOODY ED.)* Coward! and me with enough dead men to my credit to shame ye and all ye African brethren. *(He turns to his sewing.)*

GONGA

Big talker, poor fighter.

(He begins swaying from side to side, humming his queer notes.)

BLOODY ED

You wait till the morning breaks and the Virginians turn their power of guns ag'in' us and we stuck tight in the sand. Then we'll see your guts feeding fishes when the sun gits high.

GONGA

(Quietly)

You for fishes too. . . . I seed a sign . . . a sign.
(His voice rises into a low meaningless chant.)

BLOODY ED

Oh, my God, yes. . . . *(With suppressed fierceness.)* I feel it. . . . I know. Why did I ever join him in his bloody work. . . . I'd best go rot with Morgan in an English jail. Me a slave with a master and nothing to show for it. *(He huddles in a heap and begins singing, his one eye darting here and there about the room as if frightened at every shadow moving. He sings.)*

With the captain and men
And a heave ho again,
We'll hang on the yard arm at dawn. . . .

(The beating on the door at the rear commences again, followed by a woman's voice crying out.
BLOODY ED *turns toward the door, speaking.)* More

of his bloody work. Keeps her there to force her to his will, he does—and he with a woman in every port where gold goes free—and a woman by the priest. Listen at her, boy. (*Turning towards the door in a rage.*) Beat your soft white hands into bloody rags, me pretty parrot, the captain'll marry ye when he gets back. An' if I'm any judge of them ships that's hove up out there in the night ye'll be the last one of the many he's married in the days gone by.

GONGA

(*Echoing*)

The last one! A sign! I seed a sign!

BLOODY ED

Got us hemmed in, I reckon they think. (*Going to the porthole and looking out.*) There they be a-waiting for the morning to fair. And with the tide at the flood they'll float free of the bar. Then they'll board us and make an end of us for the king's sake, and the money that'll rattle in their hands! (*He pours out more liquor and drinks. GONGA reaches for a small jug that sits beside him and drinks deeply from it.*) Drink, you heathen dog. It'll take more'n that jugful in your iron belly to make you forgit the signs you seen in the shining clouds and setting sun, and all the sights that haunt ye evermore. Better tell Gibbens and Hands o' the things you seed when they break watch and see them bust your face like one o' them West Indy melons. (*He lays the garment on which he has been sewing aside and pulls a short pistol from his*

belt and begins cleaning it. GONGA takes another drink from his jug and hums his music more loudly. BLOODY ED stops cleaning his pistol. He looks at it scornfully and then throws it on the table.) What's the use of cleaning a piece with no chance to escape! *(He goes to the porthole at the right and looks out.)* I can see a glim o' dawn, but nothing o' the captain and the rest o' the crew bringing help from the Governor at Bath. *(Turning on GONGA.)* Hush that song! What to be kept harried all night with one sound and another and then driv' crazy with the devil's ditty from the likes of you! Stop it! *(Voices are heard outside.)* I hear Gibbens and the mate now. You can take your visions and demon's song on deck with you. *(Low weeping and beating against the door are heard at the right rear.)* Oh, but I feel it's true—it's true. *(Turning towards the imprisoned woman.)* I'll keep you and guard you as I'm forced to do, but it's work'll take its toll of us this evil day.

(He begins sewing again. GIBBENS comes in at the rear. He is a short stocky bull-necked man, with a protruding lower lip that gives his face the look of a perpetual snarl. He is a slave driver. His neck might be a capstan and his arm serve for a fo'mast on a brigantine. He speaks in a short harsh voice, commanding and domineering.)

GIBBENS

Gonga! Your watch. Up and at it! and keep a sharp lookout, or a spy from the enemies' ships may

come creeping up on us in the dark and we four don't want no fight on our hands till the captain comes. (*Without noticing to see whether he is obeyed, he goes to the table and drinks from the pewter cup. He sneers at BLOODY ED, laughing and twisting his mouth into a horrible grimace.*) Ah, hah! What's started ye off a-thinking of death and the devil this time that ye're a-working at yer burying gown like an old land woman? (*He drinks again.*) Every fight that I ever saw ye come to, it brought ye to shivering and to thinking of taking a burying from a stinking man o' God. (*His bulldog face lowers over BLOODY ED's cringing form.*)

BLOODY ED

(*More timidly than before*)

You won't talk so in the hours you're blown to hell. And you yerself would like it better if the captain was nearer by with the ammunition and the men—and the dawn going up shortly in the sky.

(*GIBBENS drinks again. In the silence the wind croons through the rigging.*)

GIBBENS

(*Sitting to the right of the table*)

Who'd listen to ye and ye always gabbing sorrows!

BLOODY ED

(*Shivering*)

A dead man needs a shroud and you'd best make yours.

GIBBENS

What ye talking of, you fool? The smash ye got in the face with that cutlass at Maracaibo left you talking empty to the air.

(The prisoner beats faintly on the door again, followed by a low cry of "Help, help.")

BLOODY ED

(Starting up)

Listen! It's driving me crazy . . . all the night through, a-hearing her moaning for them we killed back there and tore her from just to serve the blasted fool that captains us . . . and we likely to get our necks stretched for following him.

GIBBENS

(Somewhat shaken, as he pulls out his pistol and examines it)

Aye, aye! . . . But he'll be back with the fireballs, and with the men from shore we can whip the hordes of imps in hell!

BLOODY ED

(Continuing)

Who'd mind the killing of a woman—and each of us with them marked to us in every town in the tropic isles, but tearing one from her home and bringing her far away to marry her and . . .

GIBBENS

(Sneering)

Let's hear ye speak that to the Captain. If I'd tell him yer talk, ye knavish runt, what'd he . . .

(He draws back as if to strike him.)

BLOODY ED

(Cowering in fear)

Don't . . . I . . . I . . .

(GONGA'S swaying has commenced again, and his chanting is heard.)

GONGA

A sign! A sign! . . . I . . . Oh. . . .

(He cowers in fear before his vision, covering his face with his arm.)

GIBBENS

(Drawing back in alarm)

By the powers of sin! What! . . . Gongga, I thought you'd gone on watch. *(Raging out in fear and anger.)* Go up! *(Pointing imperiously towards the rear.)* Go!

(He starts threateningly towards the negro. GONGA makes no movement to show that he has heard except to turn slightly towards GIBBENS with his lips wrinkling back in a snarl.)

BLOODY ED

He's crazy with the fear of the things he's seen. 'Bout the midnight hour sitting there in his seat he

cried out with the voice of one with a spell and began babbling of his visions.

GONGA

(Half chanting and mumbling)

Seed . . . in the blood-red sun . . . a gallows . . .
and a man dere . . . and dat man . . . *(He begins
chanting more loudly, swaying from side to side.)*
Dat man he say . . . de time come. . . .

(His words die away in a moan.)

GIBBENS

(Trying to appear unmoved)

The skunk's drunk, and the dirty murder he done
in Hispaniola last week when we tuk the woman there
for the Captain is a-hantin' him, I reckon. . . .

BLOODY ED

Her own man it was . . . an' . . .

GIBBENS

Serves him right if he is being haunted. To run on
a harmless man and stick him in the back. *(Turning
to GONGA.)* You remember, don't you, you dog? He
crumpled up on the sand by his woman there. And he
raised his hand and cursed you as he bled his last. He
said he'd send the devil for you. *(Snarling at him.)*
You pirate's scum! Get out on deck!

BLOODY ED

And the devil will come for Blackbeard too. For

he shot him through the head as he lay a-dying. And he swore the devil'd hant the captain and come to his ship at the time of doom. Trouble's coming! Coming! I feel the dead man's curse. Blackbeard himself'll tremble when he hears the devil's footsteps come a-creeping 'cross the deck.

GIBBENS

(Staring around in a weak bravado and storming at BLOODY ED)

Stop it. You'll set the ship possessed and drive me mad.

(Suddenly with a squeak of terror GONGA springs straight up in the air and stands frozen with terror and pointing before him.)

GONGA

(His features working and his nostrils dilating with horror)

Looka! Looka! Dat man! . . . The gallows thing! Saints o' heaben! *(He falls into his seat on the bench and begins swaying, his voice rising in a chant of terror.)* Dat man! He send de debil . . . dat . . . man . . . God A'mighty . . . he coming . . . save me . . . save me. . . .

(BLOODY ED stands against the wall at the left, wringing his hands and whimpering.)

BLOODY ED

Keep him from us! Keep him from us . . . Gibbens!

GIBBENS

Damn you for a monkey-faced fool . . . you. . . .
(*He raises his hand to strike BLOODY ED, backs off from him, then turns to the negro.*) Go on watch, I tell you. The mate'll come below here quick a-searching for you. And if he gives you a blow with his crutch you won't be seeing no more gallows dripping blood in the sky. Move!

(*GONGA does not stir. His hand flutters on his knife: GIBBENS seems afraid at first.*)

BLOODY ED

(*Crying out derisively and wiping his face with his trembling hands*)

Ah hah, Gibbensen, I see you! Drive him on. . . . Drive him on!

(*GIBBENS hesitates and then seizes GONGA by the neck.*)

GIBBENS

Damn you for a bloody ape-spawn you be! I order ye out!

(*GONGA springs from his bench and hurls GIBBENS from him with great force over the table. There he lies limply. With a bound the negro is on him and seizing his throat with one hand, snatches the knife from his belt . . . but suddenly he drops back with a scream.*)

GONGA

Looka . . . da . . . oh . . . Man. . . . Oh, man

. . . de debil! (*He backs into his seat, covering his face with his arms.*) Gawd's mussy! Mussy!

(*Coughing and sputtering, GIBBENS rises and clings to the edge of the table. His face is black and blue and his thick protruding lower lip hanging down to give him a diabolical look. BLOODY ED stands as if paralyzed with fright.*)

GIBBENS

(*Snarling and speaking deliberately but weakly*)

All right, Gonga, ye monkey's pa. 'Ere's where ye passes out. (*Fingering his pistol.*) And I reckon seeing the gallows was right for you. . . . (*GONGA pays no attention to him. GIBBENS pulls his pistol from his belt.*) 'Ere's how as they'll be one man less . . . when . . .

BLOODY ED

(*Running between them*)

Blast ye, don't shoot him. Be ye wild! What'll the Captain do if he comes back and one of his crew's gone!

GIBBENS

(*Growling*)

Keep back . . . and . . .

BLOODY ED

You fool! Why stir the devil in the Cap'n . . . and he needing all his crew for the fight, with only a score to stand a hundred men.

GIBBENS

(Gradually lowering his pistol)

I'll . . . I'll . . . kill you soon as the fight's over if I have to face Blackbeard to do it.

BLOODY ED

(Picking up his shroud as he cries out)

And then you'll swing from a yardarm towards the freezing stars.

GIBBENS

May my soul burn in the deepest fires if I don't kill you!

(Suddenly a scream comes from the room at the right rear, and then the sound of a body falling to the floor. The men whirl round facing the rear. There is the sound of someone with a crutch coming, and ISRAEL HANDS, the mate, enters.)

HANDS is tall with an evil scarred face, long black hair and piercing eyes; walking with a crutch because of a shattered knee-bone—a result of one of BLACKBEARD'S pranks. He is lean, cold, of few words, deliberate, uncanny in his devilish cruelty, boasts of the fact that he has never pitied any living thing. A deep drinker and a master of men, he has a cavernous voice that chills to the bone.)

HANDS

What in the name of heaven was it that makes you stand here like men seeing the devil?

GONGA

(In a low voice)

The debbil! The debbil!

HANDS

Gonga, get out on watch.

BLOODY ED

Leave him be, leave him be! A minute back with his seeing of horrors he come nigh stabbing Gibbens to the hollow there.

HANDS

Seeing horrors! Below! Tony hisself on deck has been talking of seeing things too. . . . I'd not take much to think the devil was aboard.

GIBBENS

(Somewhat shaken)

What, what has frightened Tony?

HANDS

Oh, he said he heard queer steps walking aft, but 'twas only him thinkin' so. . . . What has happened that everybody is getting afeared above and below?

BLOODY ED

He heard him. Aye, it's right. It's right we all have to be afeared.

HANDS

Well, what was that cry?

BLACKBEARD

GIBBENS

Aye, mate, it was the woman screamed.

HANDS

The woman?

BLOODY ED

The black of the night has twisted her head.

HANDS

And you stand here and let the captain's woman . . .
(To BLOODY ED.) Open the door and . . .

BLOODY ED

(Drawing back in fear)

No, no, mate. . . . Oh . . .

HANDS

(Turning in scorn)

Gibbens! Open that door.

(GIBBENS gingerly goes over and undoes the door. BLOODY ED follows, peering after him. Only the darkness of the hole leers out at GIBBENS. HANDS rasps out.)

Go on in and see what the trouble is.

(GIBBENS disappears into the room. A moment later he rushes out excited.)

GIBBENS

She's dead . . . dead. . . .

BLOODY ED

(Mumbling)

Oh . . . Blackbeard's woman she was! and . . .
and . . .

GIBBENS

Yes, and God blast us all for spicks in hell.

HANDS

(In a flying rage he turns on BLOODY ED)

You pale-faced runt, you were set to guard her.
Now what'll happen when Blackbeard comes? Get
out of the way. . . .

*(He strikes at BLOODY ED and hobbles into the
room. He reappears and speaks somewhat
superstitiously and in awe.)*

She's dead! There she lies with her fingers cold and
slimy as a gibbet's noose!

BLOODY ED

(In a high nervous laugh)

As shore's we're damned she's singing in glory now.

GONGA

(Shaking with fright)

Dead . . . Lawd . . . Mercy . . . God! *(He
stares before him with the fascinated gaze of a hyp-
notized creature. He speaks as if to an unseen being.
Whispering.)* I hears you. . . . I hears you. . . . De
debbil. . . . Oh, my Gawd, I hears you! and dat gal-
lows red wid blood.

*(He shrinks towards his bench and falls on it, a
gasping heap of fear.)*

BLACKBEARD

HANDS

(Staring at him in amazement)

What! Listen at him. . . .

BLOODY ED

(In a wail of hopelessness)

That woman's man has done us at last . . . what he swore he would. The devil's after Gonga. He's coming for us all.

GIBBENS

Aye, he's seen him and the doom's set for Blackbeard too he says. But only the devil himself can reach through the blackness of his soul. And the devil would 'most nigh find his match to meet with him.

BLOODY ED

What's to be done now that his woman's dead? When he left last night he charged me to watch his pretty birdie. He didn't lay out for no such thing as a broke heart . . . and the dark of night with a woman's soul.

HANDS

(Becoming more and more nervous)

Don't talk the night away. It's time he's here now.

BLOODY ED

Aye, aye, and our lives won't be worth no more than a handful of sea ooze.

GIBBENS

(Snarling as he feels of his swollen throat)

You ain't afeared, air ye?

(They all stand silent a moment.)

BLOODY ED

(Jumping)

I thought I heard steps walking.

HANDS

It's nothing, you fool.

BLOODY ED

(Trying to convince himself)

No . . . nothing but the wind in the rigging stirring the water mists.

GIBBENS

(Sarcastically, crossing to BLOODY ED)

Oh, why don't you keep up yer old talk now! You hadn't ought to be afeared of Blackbeard—such a powerful man as you. Don't fear him. Tell him 'bout your pieces of eight and the threats you made.

BLOODY ED

(With the boldness of despair)

I will say it . . . and he be damned. *(More boldly.)* If I had anybody to stay me, I'd . . . I'd . . . I would! For eight months we've been his slaves . . . and not a piece of gold to come to us . . . nothing but hangings and burnings and seeing the dead go by in the watches of the night.

GIBBENS

(Eagerly egging him on, and pointing at BLOODY ED)

Keep it up . . . tell Blackbeard when he comes.
Mate, there's a pirate as storms the roaring seas.

(He seats himself again at the right of the table.)

BLOODY ED

Who listens to you and the bloody nigger choking your liver through your boots! *(Voicing his full wrath.)* Damn us all to the deepest grave . . . an' we with hearts to mind one pirate's will. And you'll see we'll all be damned. *(Coming nearer to GIBBENS and HANDS and speaking solemnly.)* I feel the devil's come aboard! And that's sure doom.

HANDS

(Starting back)

What! What! . . . Oh, before God, we have had it hard these months with the cap'n!

GIBBENS

Aye, aye! . . . and you have reason enough to speak of that, and he to shoot you through to make him laugh.

BLOODY ED

And when he returns he'll like as not un-gut us all to be seeing blood run red again.

HANDS

(More uneasily)

We'll need more help than God or man when he gets back.

(He stirs around the room.)

GIBBENS

(Pointing toward BLOODY ED)

Mate, there is more than truth, I fear, in what he says.

BLOODY ED

(Coming nearer to HANDS)

How'd we sign up in Jamaiky months ago? Fair before the world and a clean sweep. All divide the sp'ils and gold for all losses. Where's my hundred pieces of eight for a lost eye? And you for a leg—where be your five hundred? And who that's sleeping with Davy Jones tonight has any gold coming to his woman what's left alive on shore!

(HANDS pours out more liquor.)

HANDS

(Half snarling at BLOODY ED, but not committing himself)

It means death and damnation either way for us.

GIBBENS

(Taking the initiative)

But he's hated with the wrath of God by all the crew. If we but get them all with us, what could one man do against us, even if he is Blackbeard.

HANDS

(Calmly)

He ain't one man, he's scores of 'em in one. He knows it well enough.

BLOODY ED

And the treasure, our treasure . . . the fifty thousand we took from the Spanish Brig off the Leeward Islands . . . and the twelve thousand and chests of jewels on that ramping galleon we burned by Tortuga.

GIBBENS

(Now more aroused)

Yes, and the loads of treasure from the pink in the Channel of Yucatan . . . where is it? And the sugar and rum and cocoa sold from the French schooner bound for Martinique we took in the bloodiest fight that ever struck the waves.

HANDS

Aye, boys, and we ain't shared. Truth there afore God. Parts is buried in these sand banks by Ocracoke and part goes to pay the Governor, I've heard and seen, to save Blackbeard's neck from stretching the gallows tree. They's conniving between the captain and his high and mighty majesty of North Carolina.

BLOODY ED

(Fearlessly)

We can take him and 'vision out the spile he's hoarding for himself and save our own necks by giving him

over to the Virginians. . . . Then we'll escape the battle. (*Screaming out.*) Who will!

HANDS

(*Interrupting cunningly*)

If he comes back.

GIBBENS

Comes back! My God, you think. (*A light breaking over his face.*) And maybe 'e's sold our souls to keep him free.

HANDS

(*Laughing*)

But he'll come back, with his men and fireballs. A battle's life to him. He's sure he'll beat the King's men and spit on 'em as he's done afore.

BLOODY ED

(*Going to the porthole at the left and looking out*)

Like as not right now he's delivering us into the hands of them 'Ginians and saving his own neck and planning to live on the treasure we've been bleeding up for him.

(*Suddenly there is a cry outside and the sound of running feet.*)

GONGA

(*Chanting*)

The debbil! I hears you, I hears you coming, coming. . . .

HANDS

It's Tony, it be, scared crazy again.

(The door bursts open at the rear and TONY, a little dark, fierce-featured man, runs in. He is pale with fright. HANDS speaks to him.)

What in hell, Tony, . . .

TONY

I seen a spirit, the devil there. . . . He was standing in the shadows by the fo'mast an' the look of him was enough to make me quake. I brushed my hand like thees, and he gone. . . .

HANDS

(Monotonously)

You're crazy . . . crazy!

TONY

Who this stranger but the devil hisself?

BLOODY ED

The ship's doomed, I tell you, and all on board.

GIBBENS

Mate, mate, for God's sake . . .

TONY

I see him. . . . De dead man's curse is on us at last.
. . . Leave de ship, leave de ship. . . . It's doomed.

HANDS

(For once bewildered)

No, no! . . . Well, abandon ship if ye wish. (*Urging BLOODY ED and TONY towards the rear. They draw back in fear.*) Ha, ha! I ain't a-thinkin' the devil is after us. He's come for the Captain and Gonga there. Ye needn't fear. What've we got to fear!

BLOODY ED

It's all of us! All of us! The devil's aboard and we're doomed! Oh . . .

GIBBENS

When they come with the boat we'll abandon ship and leave the captain to face him. . . .

HANDS

And what then? The treasure and the gold to go to the bottom and we left empty to be hanged.

BLOODY ED

They's many a slip 'twixt the court and the gibbet if we got gold. We'll wring his secret from him and leave him to his death.

HANDS

(Starting from his thoughts and speaking excitedly)

By the bloody cross, we'll do it!

(The men drink.)

GIBBENS

(Gathering courage)

Aye, aye, he's met his match at last and . . . and
. . . we'll be free.

TONY

Listen da . . . listen da. . . Santa Maria. . . .
*(He points to the rear. There is a slow ghastly
sound of footsteps passing.)*

HANDS

(Swallowing hard)

Hush, you fools. *(The footsteps pass by. HANDS
speaks in a low voice.)* All stay here and let him come
below, and though he blast us, we'll try him for the
treasure. . . . And we'll let the men on it and then
we'll leave his soul to be tormented by the imps of fire.

BLOODY ED

(Drinking again)

Let him come down the hatchway there and
we'll . . .

TONY

And . . . and . . . fair share for all. . . . No!
Yes!

GIBBENS

(His voice like a rasp)

Trust nobody. Let us swear.

*(HANDS pulls out his knife and one after an-
other the men kiss it. HANDS goes over to*

GONGA. *He stirs in his seat. His face is set with the cold look of one almost lapsing into unconsciousness.)*

HANDS

Swear, swear!

GONGA

(Shrinking from him)

Too late! Too late. . . . Ship doomed . . . the devil's come on board. . . . Oh, Lawd Gawd! *(He begins crooning and swaying. Then he starts up.)* I hear him, hear him! Coming, coming!

(He speaks in the voice of one in a trance.)

TONY

Hear him walking, walking. . . .

(He points to the deck outside. All the men turn unconsciously and stand horror-stricken.)

BLOODY ED

(His voice in a quaver of senseless fright)

We're doomed . . . doomed! *(In a croon somewhat like the negro's.)* He's coming . . . coming! and the ship's set for the salty mud.

(At this moment there is a faint hail off the right of the ship.)

TONY

(At the porthole)

That's him! It's him, de capitan, and may the devil save us all!

HANDS

(Looking fiercely at the men and kicking GONGA)

Now we hold together or die. . . .

BLOODY ED, GIBBENS, AND TONY

Aye, aye, sir! *(Striking their cutlasses on the table.)*

It's him or we!

HANDS

Give him the signal, Tony.

(TONY picks up the candle, goes to the port-hole and waves it three or four times. A voice, much nearer this time, cries out, "Aye, aye!")

GIBBENS

Now everybody together . . . treasure for us all.
Save our necks from the fools that have us bottled up
here and revenge, revenge!

(They all pull out their cutlasses and wave them in the air, striking them on the table.)

Aye! Aye!

(They pour out liquor and drink.)

TONY

If the damned nigger would help . . .

GIBBENS

Let him meet his doom too.

TONY

(Cries out suddenly, whirling towards the rear)

Listen, I hear 'em . . . hear 'em . . . steps . . .

listen! De debbil! Oh, Santa Maria! (*He bursts out.*) Looka, looka, there's the . . .

HANDS

Quiet, quiet! Be you drunk!

(*The low soughing of the wind is heard.*

HANDS stares about him. GIBBENS rubs his eyes muttering over and over to himself.)

GIBBENS

It's nothing, nothing!

(*He pours out liquor. They all drink again and again. BLOODY ED's hands tremble and he can hardly hold his glass. In spite of himself each one is listening for the ghostly steps he has heard stalking along the deck.*)

HANDS

It's nothing. There can be nothing . . . nothing. You fools! (*More loudly.*) It's nothing.

(*The pirate song is heard off to the right. Then voices are heard nearer, the bumping of the boat against the schooner. A heavy deep voice cries out.*)

VOICE

Heigh! The watch! Where be ye! (*The three men look fearfully at each other and examine their pistols. The voice continues.*) Damn them! Hands! Gibbens! The ship might have been taken for all they'd do! (*Then follow sounds of footsteps and the*

rolling of casks and timbers.) Heave 'em up! Heave 'em up! Heave ho! (*The pirate chant rises. BLACKBEARD'S voice is heard joining in, roaring like the wind.*) Man the guns! We'll send old Davy Jones new company to his choice. What a fight we'll have! Roll 'em, me bullies. Heigh, the watch! Stand forth, villains that ye be! (*Heavy footsteps are heard coming below.*)

BLOODY ED

(In an ecstasy of terror)

Oh, my God A'mighty! It's him, it's him, and he's coming—coming down. (*Licking his lips.*) Stand by! Stand by!

(The men seat themselves nervously at the table and by the door. It is kicked open and BLACKBEARD strides on the platform.)

TONY

De Capitan! De capitan!

(A quiver runs through the men, but they try to take no notice of him! BLACKBEARD is terrible to behold, of a powerful build, armed to the teeth, with heavy boots and rough clothes. He glares at the men with eyes of a fury. His frightful appearance is intensified to a high degree by the enormous black beard that covers his face. Of extravagant length, it spreads out over his chest, growing high on his cheeks up to his very eyes, and is tied in small pigtails, the ends of which are adorned in ornaments. His

broad beetling forehead is seared by a livid scar and several lesser ones, the marks of former fights. In his ears he wears long bone earrings. . . . His shirt is undone at the collar revealing a hairy, muscle-ribbed breast.)

BLACKBEARD

Up, ye carrion crew! On deck! (*Glaring about him.*) What means this! . . . No watch set. (*Above the rolling of timbers, moving of casks, etc., increase in volume. The crew's singing roars down the fighting song. BLACKBEARD'S face lights up with a devilish sort of glee. He glances back and roars out.*) Go at it, me bully boys! We'll show the white-livered land-lubbers who care nothing for the anger of the seas. We'll show 'em how she teaches us to fight. Roar on, roar on and put out the light of day with your thunder. (*His evil face works in delight, and under the spell of the impending battle he blares out a stave of the pirate's blood song.*)

For the dead men lie all straight in rows,
And the pirates put them there.

(*He looks at the men maliciously.*) Up and at the guns . . . for a fight that would suit us all. (*None of the men stir except BLOODY ED, who trembles violently and capers in expectancy.*) Up, up, I tell ye! (*He looks narrowly at the men.*) Ah-hah, been at the old plotting again, have ye, me boys? As soon as I leave ye be, ye start plotting to give me up to the hangman's hemp. (*The men begin to look uneasy.*) Hah, hah,

I see it, the foolish knaves that ye be. And after the battle we'll have a hanging game not so pleasant for ye. Putting a bullet through your leg, Hands, warn't enough, and so one goes through your heart when the fighting's done, me mate. (*Coming down into the room.*) I'd shoot the last one of you dogs if I didn't need ye to help show these Virginians that Blackbeard is the king of the seas. (*He roars out.*) Up, now, up! (*He gives the command in a loud voice.* BLOODY ED rises in his seat to obey. BLACKBEARD pulls out his pistol and comes further into the room. With an oath he kicks the stool from under BLOODY ED, knocking TONY out of the way, he strides over to GONGA and claps the pistol to his ear.) Up on deck. (*He sees the door at the right open. Amazement and rage spread over his face. He whirls from the negro and grasps BLOODY ED by the collar, pointing to the door.*) Is this guarding Blackbeard's treasure?

(*His eyes burn into BLOODY ED's face.*)

BLOODY ED

(*Sputtering and screaming, pointing towards the door*)

Look . . . there. . . .

BLACKBEARD

(*Shaking him, but loosening his hold*)

Speak . . . speak . . .

HANDS

(*His eyes narrowing*)

She's . . . she's a bloody corpse. . . . (*With a shout of rage, BLACKBEARD sends BLOODY ED flying*)

to the floor. He goes towards the door, putting up his pistol as he goes. HANDS whirls behind him and tears from him the belt carrying his arms. He and GIBBENS cover him with their pistols.) Now we'll see who's master here. We've sworn to hold you to our will. We've slaved for you. The treasure's ours and we want it and . . . run, Tony and Gibbens, and stir the men . . . all. . . .

(GIBBENS and TONY rush out at the rear.)

BLACKBEARD

(Laughing and yet amazed)

You'd mutiny, you would! Ho, ho! . . . You think you can bend Blackbeard to your will. Captain of these men and ship I be and will remain. What's a mutiny when I'd face the devil himself if need be!

HANDS

Treasure! and we will share it!

BLACKBEARD

(Scornfully)

Treasure! Treasure! Nobody but the devil and me knows where it is and the secret be to the longest liver. Damn ye!

(He laughs again and starts towards HANDS.)

BLOODY ED

(Pointing towards the prison door)

Look, look! Captain! The dead woman! Oh, my God!

BLACKBEARD

(Whirling towards the rear)

Damn ye all for babbling old women. Dead woman, ye say! We'll see, we'll see!

(He stamps into the room at the right rear.)

BLOODY ED

(Coming to HANDS and speaking in a voice low and tense)

Shoot him, Hands. . . . Kill him and let the treasure go. Shoot . . . oh . . . and leave the ship. Leave it to him and the devil alone.

HANDS

(His courage deserting him)

Aye, aye! . . . but . . .

(The pistol wobbles in his hands. BLACKBEARD rushes out, his face darker than before.)

BLOODY ED

There she lies with her eyes looking cold into yours and she's cursed us all . . . all. . . .

BLACKBEARD

Shoot! Shoot! Ye coward. Ha, ha! Hands, me boy, I'm captain of ye yet.

(Under BLACKBEARD'S gaze HANDS slowly relinquishes his pistol and it drops to the floor.)

BLOODY ED

Oh, she's cursed us all . . . all!

BLACKBEARD

Curses! Ghosts! What more be ye seeing? Out and at the guns or I'll carve you through. (*He pulls at his cutlass. GONGA springs up before him and bursts into a wild African chant, his eyes half-starting from his head.*)

Iddy-mom-bomba—shambula—Kanda.
I-ee-i-ee-i-ee-ee. . . .

(*In the meantime the pirates' fighting song has been going full blast outside. Now it dies down to a hum. Then there is a sound of men arguing. Suddenly come cries from the crew, exclamations of fear. All sounds of rolling timbers and preparations for the fighting cease. Running feet are heard and a babble of voices crying out.*) Look! Look! My God! My God! Fly! Fly!

(*Above all this the high voice of TONY is heard wailing.*)

TONY

De debbil, de debbil on board!

(BLACKBEARD knocks GONGA out of the way and hurls BLOODY ED towards the rear. The door is jerked open. TONY's pale face appears.)

TONY

(*Gasping*)

Leave de ship . . . leave de ship . . . doom . . .
doom. . . . Fly. . . .

(*He disappears, running. HANDS and BLOODY ED rush out at the rear.*)

HANDS

Ahoy, men. Hold there, hold!

(Muffled cries are heard, creaking of cordage, and sounds of oars and bodies bumping against the boat.)

GONGA

(Still chanting)

Captain! Captain! He come. I heah him come. . . .

BLACKBEARD

(Going towards the rear)

Back, back, ye pirates! *(Pulling his cutlass, he bursts through the door. Suddenly he draws back as if thunderstruck. Impulsively he starts to draw back into the room.)* The devil! *(Then with a roar of rage.)* A spy! A spy! To the guns, men! *(He springs forward out of sight. There is the sound of a struggle and the swish and rattle of blades coming together. The fight comes nearer the door. BLACKBEARD'S form moves into view. Just as he is forced into the door by his opponent, he lunges forward. There is a rattling throaty sound and the noise of a body falling.)* There—Devil or spy, you're done for!

(BLACKBEARD staggers down into the room. His cutlass blade is dyed red. Across his face is a huge cut. His beard is covered with blood. GONGA collapses on his seat, crooning crazily.)

GONGA

(As BLACKBEARD reels in)

De dead man, he come. Oh, de dead man . . . he send de debbil!

(The pirate fighting song rises clear and mocking off the right. Suddenly there is the boom of a cannon and scream of a cannon ball going by. And then another and another. BLACKBEARD goes to the porthole at the right and raising his fist cries out.)

BLACKBEARD

Villains, cowards! To desert the ship for fear of a spy.

(Picking up his belt of pistols he fires through the porthole. Suddenly his face lights up with fiendish glee as cries come from off right.)

Aye, damn ye, there's a cannon ball in the midst of ye, mutinous wretches! *(The cannon off the left roar again.)* Now, with yer boat shot to splinters sink and rot, traitors all of ye!

(The firing increases. Now a shower of bullets falls on the ship. BLACKBEARD cries.) Gonga, Gonga, up, up! By the powers of hell, we'll fight the King's men alone. Up!

(GONGA pays no attention to him, except that his swaying increases. BLACKBEARD towers over him.) To the guns! *(GONGA chants in terror.)* Then may hell consume you for bringing this curse on me.

(The guns roar again, there is a crashing, tearing sound. BLACKBEARD with a guttural roar

shoots GONGA and kicks his body on the floor. Reeling and staggering, he goes towards the rear.)

I fight ye to the last.

(He goes through the door at the rear just as another broadside is delivered from the ships. He stands silhouetted against the growing morning light. Looking towards the enemy and shaking his fist, he cries out:)

Damnation seize ye! I give no quarter nor ask none!

(He staggers as a bullet strikes him. He waves his cutlass in the air.)

Blackbeard dares ye all!

(He shouts exultingly. A rain of bullets falls on the deck. He shivers and clutches at his heart, then crumples up slowly on the deck and falls in the door on the platform, dying. Feebly he raises his cutlass in his hand and gives a faint shout as he dies.)

Heave ho, boys!—boys, to the fight!

(The cutlass clatters to the deck. Another gun is fired. Again there is a crash and tearing sound. Cheering rises from the victorious sloops.)

CURTAIN

Bloody Ed's Song

"Blackbeard"

With the wind and a blow and the
With a piece and a knife and the



dev - il be - low We will
sea for a wife And an



scour the Span - ish Main.
eye and a leg— lost for gain.

BLACKBEARD

Bloody Ed's Song

"Blackbeard."

Moderato *mf*

In a wind - ing shroud of

green sea - weed, — There

cresc. ma - ny a dead man — lies,

cresc.

And the waves a - bove them glit -

The first system of the musical score for 'Blackbeard'. It consists of a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The vocal line has a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and chords in the right hand.

- ter at night, With the

The second system of the musical score. The vocal line continues the melody. The piano accompaniment maintains the same rhythmic pattern, with some chordal changes in the right hand.

stare of the dead men's eyes.

The third system of the musical score. The vocal line concludes the phrase. The piano accompaniment ends with a final chord in the right hand and a sustained note in the bass. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is present at the beginning of the system.

BLACKBEARD

First system of the musical score. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are "No rest, no sleep, ten fath-om_ deep, They". The piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piano part features chords and moving lines in both hands. The word "decreso." is written at the end of the piano part.

No rest, no sleep, ten fath-om_ deep, They

decreso.

Second system of the musical score. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "watch with their glit - 'ring eyes.". The piano accompaniment continues with chords and moving lines. The system ends with a double bar line.

watch with their glit - 'ring eyes.

Third system of the musical score. The vocal line has the lyrics "Uh - m - m - m! Uh - m - m - m - m!". The piano accompaniment continues. The word "rit." is written above the vocal line. The system ends with a double bar line.

Uh - m - m - m! Uh - m - m - m - m!

rit.

OLD WASH LUCAS¹

A Tragedy of Farm Life

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OLD WASH LUCAS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

*As originally produced by The Carolina Playmakers
at The Play-House, Chapel Hill, North Carolina,
February 11 and 12, 1920.*

WASH LUCAS, *the stingiest man in the county,*
Anthony Combs
IDA LUCAS, *his daughter,* Katherine Galloway Batts
PERRY LUCAS, *his son,* James Greenwood
TIM ADAMS, *a farm hand, once Ida's beau,*
David Reid Hodgins

SCENE: A North Carolina farm home.

TIME: Christmas Eve several years ago.

George McF. McKie and Ellen Lay, Assistant Directors.



Scene from *Old Wash Lucas*. TIM ADAMS (David Reid Hodgkin); PERRY LUCAS (James Greenwood);

SCENE

THE scene opens in the kitchen of the Lucas home. A fire is burning dimly in the fireplace at the right front, and around the chimney are pots and pans. In the center is an oblong eating-table covered with a well-worn oil-cloth. Three or four splint-bottomed chairs are about the room. In the right rear is a cupboard, and at the center rear a door leading to the outside. A rag pillow is stuffed in a broken pane of the window at the left front. The room is lighted by a sputtering lamp.

IDA LUCAS is preparing supper, standing by the table stirring cornbread dough in a milk-bucket. She is a plain woman of thirty, thin-chested, tall, with a pasty bitter face. Her dark hair, slightly graying, is done in a ragged coil at the back of her head. Her clothes are poor and untidy, shoes coarse and shabby. As she stirs the dough, she takes her snuff-brush from her mouth and now and then spits into the fire.

A light tap sounds on the door at the left. IDA sets her bucket quickly down on the table, listens, then goes to the door at the rear and makes sure it is fastened. She crosses the room and comes to open the door at the left as TIM ADAMS enters.

IDA

(Drawing back in surprise)

Why, Tim, where'd you come from?

(She puts her snuff-brush in her apron pocket and wipes her mouth slyly with her sleeve. Then she goes toward TIM with a keen look of pleasure on her face which changes quickly to uncertainty and fear.)

TIM is tall and slightly stooped. His long arms end in two great battered hands. He is dressed in rough working clothes, patched trousers, an old overcoat, short and ragged at the elbows, and pinned across his breast with a small wooden peg. His brogan shoes are thick with mud, and bits of cotton lint stick here and there on his clothes. As he comes in, he pulls off his misshapen straw hat and holds it in his hands, twisting it somewhat nervously. His face is dull, rather lifeless, with prominent nose, small eyes close together, hair thin and light colored and his lips stained with tobacco juice. A light growth of beard covers his face. All in all, his appearance denotes a "good sort o' fellow" without much mental ability, one of that class of simple farm hands to be met with in North Carolina, who generally speak of their means of living as "working a harling." He stops just inside the door, rolling his chew of tobacco in his mouth, twisting his hat, and glancing inquiringly at the rear door.)

TIM

Heigho, Ida—— Is Wash asleep?

IDA

(Softly closing the door behind him)

Yeh. Come in to the fire, Tim. *(She pauses, hesitatingly.)* You must be cold and wet. It's shore a bad time to travel.

TIM

(Comes over to the fire and spits, and warms his feet)

I was out there—*(jerking his thumb by his head)*—half a hour 'fore I could make shore the ole man's in this here room or in that'n. Reckon—he won't hear us talk? *(He looks at IDA uncertainly.)*

IDA

No, he's dead asleep now. Didn't sleep none last night, turning and a-turning in bed! A man from the bank up there in Ashley was out here with him all yis-tiddy evening and——

TIM

They was?

IDA

Yeh. Ever since then Pa's been worse off. But he dropped off 'bout a hour ago. Have a seat. I'm shore glad to see you.

TIM

Wake him or not, I had to come. What'd that bank man want with Wash?

IDA

I don't know. They stayed shet up in there a-talk-ing—I don't know what about.

TIM

That's quair—him to be coming to see Wash, and then the bank to go busted today. But I don't reckon he got none of Wash's money, did he? (*He twists his mouth ironically.*)

IDA

Hunh, that he didn't! You might 'a' knowed that. Pa ain't the kind of man to keep it all locked up here in a box fer twenty year and then let it out to some bank. But is the bank shore 'nough busted?

TIM

Yeh, I was over to Ashley this evening and heared 'bout it. (*He looks out of the window at the left, then speaks bitterly.*) Yeh, let them as has money to lose, lose it. Old Stingy Wash Lucas, as they calls him, won't lose nary a red, and——

IDA

(*Timidly, touching TIM's arm*)

Don't start up that talk ag'in, Tim. I ain't seed you fer six months and le's don't start on that there.

TIM

Naw, 'twon't be no 'count to, but——

IDA

Set down. I wa'n't expecting you, Tim. (*She smiles at him suddenly, the bitterness gone out of her face, and gathers her skirt around her as if to sit down.*)

TIM

Well, er—Ida, I didn't come to set with you none. I got to git back. And I don't want no row with Wash tonight nuther. So——

IDA

(*Looking up surprised*)

What's the matter, Tim?

TIM

It's about Perry.

IDA

(*Glancing at the rear door*)

Perry! They ain't nothing to matter with him, is they?

TIM

No more'n they is with all them mill people over there in town. 'Fluenzy's everywhere, and Perry's got to have help. (*He rolls his hat against his thigh, his other hand outstretched towards the fire.*)

IDA

Perry ain't sick, is he?

TIM

He's terrible sick, but he won't go to bed, just waits on Elsie, and one of the kids is taking it.

IDA

And me, his own sister, hadn't heard a word about it—and living right here at him!

TIM

(Lowering his voice)

Naw, you know he's so fool proud he wouldn't ask fer a cent from him in there. *(He sits down.)*

IDA

(Going to the door at the rear and listening, then coming back to the table)

He's sleeping all right now, but 'twon't do fer him to wake up and ketch you here.

TIM

(Ironically still)

That it won't. Lord, he ain't got no more use fer me'n a pizen snake, and I don't care much more fer him. You know, Ida, how he—well——

IDA

(Coming up to TIM)

Don't talk like that, Tim. Both of us knows how it is. How'd you find out 'bout Perry?

TIM

I carried a load of cotton over there to Ashley this evenin' fer Mr. Jones, and they was a big crowd of folks down at the bank and some of 'em told me 'bout his sickness and hard luck lately, so I went over there and, Ida, it's worse'n I thought. They're 'bout to starve.

IDA

Starve! They can't be that bad off.

TIM

They air, though. And him in there—(*nodding to the rear*)—with his close-fisted dollars all piled up, dollars that Perry helped to make! Ida, I want you to try to git some money out'n Wash. That's what I come by fer. I got Mr. Jones to let me have his horse and buggy to go over there, and on the way I thought I'd come by and tell you and see if you couldn't git something out o' yer pa.

IDA

Me? Tim, you know he won't help Perry. He ain't never 'lowed his name to be mentioned since he left here seven year ago. He thinks he's gitting rich over there in the mill.

TIM

Yeh, yeh, he thinks. I know how he is. Ain't he kept us apart ten year? But he's got plenty of money, and Perry's got to have help.

IDA

'Twon't do no good. He blames Perry fer his being tuk with that p'ralysis. He useter love Perry in that quair way of hisn, but he ain't got no use fer him now.

TIM

But somebody's got to do something. There's Perry's little chil'ren 'thout enough to eat. Perry told me he couldn't buy another mouthful on a credit. Here 'tis Christmas Eve'n he can't even git his kids nothing.

IDA

What can we do, Tim? They ain't nothing fitten to eat in the house or I'd send them something.

TIM

All we can do is to git some money from Wash. And he's got to have some to save Elsie. He said if he could git a specialist they could save her life. But he won't come 'thout money g'aranteed.

(IDA stands for a moment undecided. TIM turns first one way and then another, warming himself. IDA sets a pot on the fire, gets a dish-cloth and wipes the table, then sits down in a chair.)

IDA

Lord, I told Perry 'twouldn't do fer him and Elsie to marry and move to that there mill. Their place was on the farm.

TIM

Yeh, but who can blame him fer leaving when he had sech a daddy as old —

IDA

That's all he could do, I spect. And now he's got down where he's got to have help to live.

TIM

(Coming closer to the table and looking at IDA)

He's shore in a bad fix, Ida. And they ain't nothing else to do but git the money from Wash, I tell you.

IDA

Couldn't Perry borrow it?

TIM

No, he's tried. Prices is bad, and they ain't no money stirring. You'll just have to ask him.

IDA

(Vehemently)

Tim, I can't ask him, I tell you.

TIM

(Pleadingly)

Shore he won't refuse his own boy. Shore he won't.

IDA

(Turning sharply towards TIM)

Don't you know better'n that? Didn't he let Ma lie on her death bed and die just 'cause he was so stingy

he wouldn't git a doctor? Kept saying, "'Twa'n't nothing"—kept saying it till she died.

TIM

But maybe he would help. Maybe——

IDA

No! And I'm scared to ask him. He's terrible when he gits stirred up.

(She goes to the chest at the rear and takes out a shawl. TIM stands looking in the fire. He turns and sees IDA putting the shawl around her shoulders.)

TIM }

What you gonna do?

IDA

(Defiantly)

I'm going to Perry's. If I can't give 'em money, I can wait on 'em.

TIM

You can't do that, Ida. That ain't the kind of help they need worst. You can't go proguing up there through the mud and water. And ther's Wash to be looked after.

IDA

I'd forgot him. *(She stands a moment looking at the floor, then throws down her shawl and comes back to the fire.)* I've allus got to tend to him. I wonder

how many more years it's going to last. (*She drops into a chair by the table.*)

TIM

(*Moodily*)

I'd help Perry if I could, but I ain't got nothing. Here I been working a harling for ten year, and just when I was gitting a little saved up, him in there cheats me out of it. Yeh, harling! We're all harlings, that's what! (*He runs his fingers through his thin hair, sits down beside IDA and lays his hat on the floor.*) Well, maybe they ain't no chance of gittin' nothin' out of him. But I thought you'd just try him, fer Perry.

IDA

I wish I could, Tim, but I'm scared of him. And he's liable to have another stroke if I stir him up 'bout Perry. I know I hate him, but I don't want to be the cause of his being tuck ag'in.

TIM

(*Despondently*)

Well, I'm going over to Perry's and set up—— (*He reaches for his hat and gets up. IDA sits gazing into the fire, twisting a ring on her finger.*) 'Tain't right for things to be like this, Ida. People ain't made to live the way we've had to live——

IDA

(*Bitterly*)

No, 'tain't right. But they ain't nothing right in this

here world. All of us has been just plumb slaves, and all to put money in his old steel box. I ain't never had nothing like other women—nothing.

TIM

Shore is bad. (*Looking at the fire.*) I'm sorry fer you. Sorry fer myself too.

IDA

Sometimes—sometimes I could kill him. What's any of our lives been worth 'cause of him? I reckon I hadn't ought to complain so, but I ain't seed nobody to talk to in so long that I'm 'bout plumb distracted, hearing nothing but his babbling and singing and playing that there old harp.

TIM

(*Warming himself at the fire*)

He don't sing and play on that old harp the way he used to, does he?

IDA

Yeh, more'n ever. He gits childisher every day. I'm just wore out with him. (*With a touch of shrillness in her voice.*) Wore out, I tell you! (*They remain silent for a moment; then TIM makes a movement to go.*)

TIM

Well—I—I—got to be going. But I sorter wanted to—to——

IDA

You ain't going this quick, air you, Tim? You know I ain't seed you in—in six months. (*She looks at him timidly.*)

TIM

Yeh, yeh, it's late and I got to git on and set up—I don't reckon we can do nothing fer Perry after all—but I thought—— (*For a moment he stands undecided. IDA rises. He notices her turning the ring on her finger.*) Well, I see you still got that ring I give you.

IDA

(*With a touch of softness as she looks at him and then away*)

Yeh, it's 'bout the only thing I ever had give to me, Tim.

TIM

Been a good 'un, ain't it?

IDA

That it has, Tim. It ain't changed a bit.

TIM

That jooler man I got it from said 'twas a good un. Said 'twould last a lifetime. That's been about ten year, ain't it?

IDA

Ten year tonight, Tim.

TIM

(Brightly)

Yeh, it has. I hadn't thought of that. Ten year——
(Musing.) Ten year—'twas Christmas time then,
wa'n't it? Well I got to go. *(He turns and then stops.)* Has the old man quit trying to git it away
from you?

IDA

No. He's all the time after it 'cause it's got a little
gold about it. *(IDA stands with folded hands looking
into the fire. She glances sideways at TIM.)* If
things had been different we'd have a place of our own
now, like we useter talk 'bout, wouldn't we, Tim?

TIM

(Turning away his head)

Yeh, yeh, I reckon so! We'd a shore got along all
right together, I bet, but——

IDA

I always been hoping that things would change—
and I believe they will, Tim. That's all I been looking
to—but you've stayed away a long time—six months.

TIM

(Clearing his throat and looking off)

Yeh—but Wash—you know how he is——

IDA

(Brushing her hand across her face)

I know. But you used to come when you got a
chance.

TIM

I did, Ida. But—— (*With fumbling decisiveness.*) I—been wanting to tell you 'bout me and Josie.

IDA

(*Looking up quickly*)

'Bout you—'bout you and Josie?

TIM

(*Embarrassed*)

Well, we sorter fixed it up. (*IDA remains silent.*) We've got it all planned out fer next Saturday night. (*He stops for a moment.*) I thought a lot of you, Ida. But ten years is a long time to wait, with no sign of things changing.

IDA

I hadn't heared 'bout it, Tim.

TIM

We sorter kept it quiet. But I kinder thought I ought to tell you.

IDA

I reckon it was right fer you to tell me.

TIM

We got it all planned out. I got a house rented over in Ashley and we're going to move in right away.

IDA

Going to move to Ashley?

TIM

I didn't much want to go, but Josie said we couldn't make nothing starting as tenants, not with prices so low. And maybe we can save enough to buy us a piece of land 'fore long.

IDA

Look here, Tim, that's the way Perry used to talk.

TIM

I know, but it's different with us. It won't take much fer us to live on.

IDA

Tim, you ain't made fer that mill life.

TIM

I know, I like the farm—fresh air, growing crops, and sich like, just the way you've said it, but Josie wants to go to town, and I reckon we can do all right—— Why what you mean? (*IDA hands him the ring.*)

IDA

(*Looking away*)

You can take it back now, Tim. It don't mean nothing.

TIM

Why, why, it's yourn.

IDA

Hurry, and take it.

TIM

Naw, I can't do that, Ida. You got to keep it. I think a lot of you, and I'm sorry fer you yet—— Naw, you keep it.

IDA

(Speaking loudly and with sudden bitterness)

Take it! I'm going to wake him up and try to git that money fer Perry. *(Her loud words wake old WASH and his voice is heard in the next room, shrill and high. TIM slips across the room calling to IDA in a low voice.)*

TIM

Try and git it then, Ida, and I'll come back from Perry's fer it. *(He goes out, closing the door behind him.)*

WASH

(Calling from the next room)

Ida! Ida!

(For a moment IDA stands motionless, looking at the ring. Suddenly she takes it off and throws it towards the fire. It rolls on the hearth. She runs, picks it up, and slips it back on her finger.)

WASH

Ida! Ida!

(The sound of a mouth harp is heard. IDA wipes her eyes with her apron, hurriedly stirs

the fire and goes out through the door at the rear. The shrill voice of the old man is heard.)

WASH

I heard somebody talking! I heard somebody talking! Roll me in there fer my supper. It's cold in here.

(There is a medley of incoherent babbling, punctuated by IDA'S sharp weary voice. A moment later she comes in rolling old WASH in a wheel chair. There is little of him visible except his head, large and bullet-shaped. His hair is thin and grey, his eyes quick and sharp, hawk-like. His nose is large, his mouth drawn far to the right from paralysis. A thin growth of white beard covers his face. There is something snake-like in the way his enormous head raises itself above the folds of quilts and old coats wrapped about him. His legs and left arm are paralyzed and his head has a doddering movement like that of a very young infant.)

WASH

I thought I heard somebody talking. Hah! Didn't I? *(Ida wheels him up to the table. He begins playing with the table cloth, his right hand never still.)* Say, gal, wa'n't that somebody talking?

IDA

(Putting the bread on the fire)

No, it weren't nobody.

WASH

(Slapping at a fly)

I thought I heared somebody say something.

IDA

I tell you 'twa'n't nothing—nobody but me. I was just—singing a little to myself.

WASH

(Turning with a bird-like motion of his head, and looking at her)

Singing? You ain't sung nothing in years. You got too old to sing. Singing? Hah! hah! hah! I like music. Now sing it fer me. I'd like to hear you. Heh! heh! heh! *(He tries to scratch the back of his neck.)*

IDA

(Busy with the supper)

I can't—I——

WASH

Hah? Can't? What ails yer eyes? Been crying? Hah! Singing and crying. What you been crying 'bout?

IDA

Nothing. *(She goes to the cupboard and takes out a jar of milk. She pours out a bowlful and crumbles bread into it.)*

WASH

(Slapping the side of his face)

That you have. You been crying! Heh! heh! heh!

IDA

I ain't been crying. I wish I could cry. Who wouldn't cry—fixed like me? Oh, Lord!

WASH

I knowed you'd been a-crying. You think yer old daddy's too hard on you, that's what you think. You think he won't never die and leave you his money. But I'm good fer many a year yit, many a year.

IDA

What makes you talk like that? I hate yer money, and——

WASH

I know you. You think I'm too hard on you. But you're having a easy time to what I had. Hah, when I growed up I was sent to work barefooted in the winter, beat and cuffed about, beat and cuffed. Didn't know what 'twas to have 'nough to eat. But I said I'd git started some day and pay the whole damned world back fer the way I'd been treated—and I have, I have. I've made money, plenty of it, and I've made 'em suffer, suffer! Hah! hah! hah! *(Ironically.)* Sing me that song.

IDA

Here, eat your supper. *(She sets the bowl down on the table before him.)*

WASH

Heigh! Putt the kittle on the fire. I want you to shave me.

IDA

I done putt it on.

WASH

Well, if you won't sing, I'll sing. I like singing. When I was young, yer mammy said I was a good songster. Heh! heh! heh! heh! (*He sings.*)

I will arise and go to Jesus
Over in the camp-ground.
Father and mother rest from their labor
Over in the camp-ground.

Hah! hah! hah! That's a good 'un, but they ain't a damn word of truth in it, not nary 'un. (*Repeating half to himself.*) "Rest from their labor, Over in the camp-ground." (*He slaps at a fly and knocks over his mush, then stops and looks at it stupidly.*) Now who done that? (*He knits his brows as if trying to remember.*) Say, Ida, who'n the devil knocked over my bowl? (*He begins slapping the mush with his hand and eating it. IDA patiently gets more milk and bread, takes a dishcloth and wipes the table clean in front of him, then gives him his bowl and spoon. As she sets the bowl before him, he reaches out with a quick movement and catches her by the wrist.*) Still a-wearing Tim's ring, hah? When you going to quit it? You ain't never going to git married.

IDA

Oh, turn me a-loose!

WASH

Gimme that ring. I been axing you fer it a long time. You ain't got no use fer it. (*IDA pulls the ring from her finger and throws it in his lap. He puts it on, cackling with delight.*) Hah! hah! hah! (*He begins eating with a disgusting sucking noise, looking now and then at the ring, and rubbing it against the quilt.*) Didn't know you'd give it up so easy. Something must a-happened. (*IDA sits down and rests her head in her hand. He speaks after a moment.*) How long I been asleep? Hah?

IDA

(Wearily)

Not long. (*WASH goes on with his eating, after eyeing her suspiciously as if trying to find out what the trouble is.*)

WASH

This is Christmas Eve, ain't it?

IDA

Yeh, it's Christmas time.

WASH

(Stops his eating and looks straight before him)

Heh! heh! heh! Christmas time! Who'd a thought it! Well, I reckon they'll be some as won't have

enough money to buy they kids nothing. But they ought to take care of they money like me, and——

IDA

(Turning quickly)

Yes, and if they was all like you—like——

WASH

(Snapping his head to one side)

Hah! What you saying, gal?

IDA

(Turning back to the fire)

Nothing, nothing. (WASH goes on with his eating. He stops, lays down his spoon, and clumsily wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.)

WASH

Them there serenaders'll come around ag'in tonight, won't they, a-singing they songs? They gener'ly comes Christmas Eve, don't they?—Fools wasting they time!

IDA

They'll be apt to come. (*Wearily.*) Young folks loves to have good times at Christmas.

WASH

That they do! That they do! But you and me's too old fer that. We ain't no longer young folks. But we still likes our music, don't we? Hah! hah! hah! (*He sings.*)

Sweet will it be there close to my Saviour
Over in the camp-ground.

(*His voice cracks.*) Heh! heh! heh! That's shore a good un! My old man useter sing it first rate after he'd beat my britches off with a hick'ry. But I got it back on him. I got it back on him. He's dead and rotten, and I'm still a-living, so I am, bless God!

Oh, I will arise and go to Jesus,
Over, over in the camp-ground.

(*His hand wanders vaguely before him; then he feels under the quilt wrapped around him, rubs his forehead as if trying to remember something.*) Heigh, Ida, what you reckon 'tis I want? (*He rubs his forehead again.*)

IDA

Your old harp, I reckon.

WASH

Hah! hah! hah! That's it. And I couldn't think of it. It's in there. (*Motioning to the other room.*) Git it.

IDA

(*Making no move*)

Pa, can't you be quiet a while. I—I want to talk to you.

WASH

Well, go ahead and talk. But it's quare to me, fer you ain't never wanted to talk to me before. Cain't

I play my harp and hear you too? Git it. I allus plays it after supper.

IDA

I want to ask you a question. Let the old harp go.

WASH

(His eyes begin to shine and his head dodders as he half-screams)

Hah! Git me that harp. I got to do something. I ain't got my money now, and——

IDA

(Whirling towards him)

What's—— Ain't got—yer money? That man from the bank didn't—he didn't——?

WASH

(Beating on the table with his bowl)

What you know 'bout him? Nothing. 'Course I got my money. I just started to say I—I sold this here place.

IDA

(Staring at him in amazement)

You sold the place! What am I——? Lord a-massy! You said time and ag'in that you'd leave it to me.

WASH

Heh! heh! heh! That's all right. I got my life-time right in it. You wouldn't need it nohow when

I'm gone. And you know they ain't nothing like having the money. Hush yer mouth now, and git me that there harp. (*IDA goes into the room at the rear and brings back a small mouth organ. WASH takes it eagerly and begins puffing up and down, blowing out the semblance of "In the Sweet Bye-and-Bye."* *IDA sits by the fire with her chin in her hand. WASH continues his playing.*)

IDA

(*Turning around and speaking resolutely*)

Fer the land's sake don't play that tonight or you'll run me crazy.

WASH

Hah? Crazy! I ain't crazy. That's a good song. I'm coming along. I'm coming along. I'm gitting better, ain't I? Hah! hah! hah! (*He begins playing again, then stops and beats the mouth organ against his thigh to shake out the saliva.*)

IDA

I want to talk to you. I got something to ask you.

WASH

(*Eyeing her suspiciously*)

Hah! Well, talk. (*He starts playing again.*)

IDA

It's 'bout Perry. (*A quiver runs through the old man's body. The harmonica slips from his fingers*)

and falls to the floor. He closes his eyes. IDA looks at him, half afraid of what she has said. Suddenly WASH opens his eyes with a jerk, brings his fist down on the table with a bang, seizes the bowl and crashes it to the floor. Then his hand wanders up towards his throat and he unfastens his coat as if suffocating.)

WASH
(Screaming)

What'd you say! Hah! Don't you say his name, don't you! (*The doddering of his head continues.*) Damn him! Damn him! (*Again he hits the table with his fist.*)

IDA
(Rising from her chair)

Pa——!

WASH
(His eyes beginning to shine again)

Hush it! Don't you speak of him to me. I hate him! I hate him!

IDA
Lord, Lord, yeh, you hate everything, everything on the green earth.

WASH
I hate him! I hate him! Didn't he run off and leave me to be tuck with p'ralysis. Him with his high notions went over there to town—— (*He points before*

him.)—to make money and git independent, too big-gity fer me, his old daddy—me here helpless, and he ain't never been a-nigh me—(*Shouting.*)—me who useter could walk my thirty miles and feel fresh at night—me laid up here paralyzed. Damn him! He ain't no kin to me. Hah! hah! hah!

IDA

But we got to do something fer him. He's bad off.

WASH

Hush it! Ain't I here helpless 'count of him and likely to die any minute? (*He raises his hand.*) I putt a curse on him when he left me here by myself, and it'll git him, you see if it don't! Hah! hah! hah!

IDA

(*Defiantly*)

You ain't got no heart in you. It's yer fault and you know it as well as I do. He'd a come back, but you wouldn't let him—he a-living in two miles of you, and you wouldn't let nobody speak of him. But I'm going to speak.

WASH

(*Shrilly*)

Yeh, I putt a curse on him. He's the only thing I ever loved in this here world, and he went back on me. But let 'em all be ag'in' me. I'll show 'em. (*He clutches at his throat.*)

IDA

They ain't nobody ag'in' you. It's you ag'in' everybody else.

WASH

Now, Ida, don't you . . .

IDA

You think he's over there gittin' rich, and he's starving to death, that's what he is.

WASH

What's that 'bout starving! That's a lie. What you up to?

IDA

'Tain't no lie. Tim's been here and told me.

WASH

Tim! I thought I heared somebody. (*Helplessly.*) You all trying to git my money, that's what you air. (*Triumphantly.*) But you won't, you won't. Not yit nohow.

IDA

Elsie's 'bout to die and the children's sick. We got to help 'em.

WASH

That's a lie. Somebody's a-telling that to git my money.

IDA

(Despairingly)

You got to help 'em, I tell you. They need money to git a doctor from off yander or Elsie's going to die, and——

WASH

Hah! hah! hah! I putt a curse on him. It's a-work-ing, ain't it? I'll bring him down on his knees, I'll bring him down. I bring 'em all down.

IDA

They made money fer a while. But he's been sick off'n on fer two year. He's got that cotton lint in his lungs. Elsie ain't been able to work none. And all they'd saved's been spent. They're starving—starving to death.

WASH

(Raising his hand warningly and wheezing)

He ain't no worse off'n I am—heh, heh, heh! Damn him! Let him die, let 'em all die. I been cursing him fer seven long year, and I knowed he'd git it by and by. *(He looks at IDA cunningly and then pulls out a black steel document box from under the quilt and slams it down on the table.)* I putt many a dollar in that there box, but he won't never git nary a cent of it. I've had my share of suffering in this world and let him have hisn.

IDA

(After a moment, speaking harshly)

I tell you you got to do something! *(She moves*

closer to him. He looks up at her in fear and tries to move away. Suddenly she snatches up the box, and he makes no effort to interrupt her.)

WASH

Hah-hah-hah! Go ahead, go ahead. I knowed it'd fetch you. I knowed you'd turn ag'in' me some day like the wrath of Old Master. He told me I'd better putt it where you couldn't git it.

IDA

Where's the key?

WASH

Don't look at me like that, don't you.

IDA

(Coming closer and speaking in the same dull hard voice)

Where's the key?

WASH

Heh—heh—heh! They ain't nothing in it. I done fixed it. I s'pected some day you'd all turn ag'in' me and try to rob me of my money. Hah-hah! He told me yistiddy that's what'd happen.

IDA

Where's the key?

WASH

It ain't locked, open it. *(She opens it, finds it empty and throws it from her.)* Hah-hah-hah! *(His*

head begins to wobble and his eyes roll. He clutches at his throat again and again, struggling for breath.)

IDA

O Lord, I could kill you! Where's that money?

WASH

(Thickly)

That's all right, that's all right.

IDA

I been your slave fer thirty long year, and I'm done of it. Part of that money's mine, and I'm going to have it.

WASH

Don't look at me like that, Ida. Don't you! Stop it! God A'mighty! *(As IDA picks up the butcher knife from the table and starts toward him.)* I got a knife too. *(He whips out a long knife from under the quilt. IDA starts walking obliquely around him. He tries to twist around to keep her in front of him.)*

IDA

I'm going to kill you if you don't tell me. Perry's got to have help.

WASH

Hah! Ida! Ida, don't you! *(She draws nearer to him.)* I'll tell you! I'll tell you! I ain't got a cent, I ain't.

IDA

Where is it?

WASH

It's all been putt in the bank. I sent it yistiddy by the—the cashier. (*He sways from side to side. IDA throws her knife from her and sinks into a chair. WASH makes a gasping noise, fighting for breath.*) Ida! Ida! Git me some water! Ida—— (*She pays no attention to him. After a moment the door opens and PERRY LUCAS comes in. He is dressed in shabby clothes, bare-headed, wet and muddy. His feverish eyes stare brightly out from his unshaven face—a face typical of the slaves of the mill looms, with its greenish pallor. As the door opens WASH tries to turn around to see who it is. IDA starts up, staring dully at PERRY as he looks around the room. WASH speaks.*) Who's that, Ida? Who's that?

IDA

It's Perry.

WASH

Hah! (*With a violent effort he catches hold of the table and turns himself about. IDA goes to PERRY and clutches at his coat. He shudders and coughs. She hurries to the fireplace and stirs the fire.*)

IDA

Come to the fire, Perry.

WASH
(*Blankly*)

Who're you? What you want?

PERRY
I've come for some money. (*He coughs.*)

WASH
(*Raising his voice*)

And you've come back! Hah! hah! Where's them there fine clothes and all you useter brag you's going to git when you left the old man? You're down and out, ain't you? You're down and out. Heh! heh! heh! (*He points his long claw-like forefinger at PERRY.*) I knowed you'd try and come back, but I ain't changed, I ain't. Hah! Git me some water, Ida!

IDA
Come and warm, Perry. You're frozen.

WASH
No, you don't. Don't you come a step nigher.

PERRY
No, I ain't cold. I'm burning up. I've come fer help.

IDA
(*Throwing out her arms*)
Ain't I been a-begging him fer you? And I might a-killed him, I don't know. But it's too late now. He can't help you none.

PERRY

(Brushing his arm across his forehead)

Oh, I tell you, I got to have help. I don't want you to give me nothing, just lend it to me. I'll pay you back. Anything fer Elsie and the children.

WASH

Children! You can lose yourn like I lost mine. I had a son oncet and he turned ag'in' me and left me seven long year by myself. And I don't fergit like t'other folks, I don't.

PERRY

That's done and gone now. I was proud then. But I ain't got no pride no more—I want you to help me.

WASH

We allus git justice in the end. Now you know how I've felt, year in, year out, night after night with no son by me—here helpless, and you with two good legs and arms to be going about.

IDA

(Bursting into a high laugh)

It ain't no use—it's done—it's done too late!

PERRY

No, it ain't. The doctor says we can save her if we can git that specialist here. *(He turns towards WASH.)* Can't you see? I got to have some money. *(He comes closer.)* Give me the money. I got to git

back—they ain't nobody there but Tim. She's sick, I tell you, and I—I'm sick too—— (*He coughs.*) The mill—the mill has—— (*He comes still closer to* WASH.)

WASH

(*Pulling out his knife*)

Quit it, Perry! (*He shivers and drops the knife to the floor.*) Perry, Perry, think of it, boy, seven long year an' I ain't seed you. (*His hand wanders out toward PERRY, who stands with bowed head, his arms hanging lifelessly at his sides.*) Seven long year and me waiting for you, boy, day and night a-thinking of you. (*He clutches at his throat.*)

PERRY

But Elsie's terrible sick, and—I got to git back—quick.

WASH

Could you git the doctor there tonight, could you? If I's to—if I's to——

PERRY

You will help me, won't you? (*He starts toward* WASH *with outstretched arms.*)

WASH

Seven year, boy, think of it! Seven year——! (*The door opens and TIM runs in, wet, muddy, and out of breath.*) Heigh! What——

PERRY

(Turning toward the door)

What is it, Tim? What's happened?

TIM

Right after you left she was tuck with a stifling spell and went all of a sudden like. I run here to git you. *(PERRY is taken with a fit of coughing after which he feels blankly around him. TIM helps him to a seat.)*

WASH

What's that? What's that?

TIM

Elsie's dead, that's all. It don't mean nothing to you.

WASH

Now! Now! That's a lie. Perry boy, I'll help you out, I'll help you. But seven long year is hard to fergit, hard to fergit. Perry, I'll help you. *(PERRY sits staring blindly before him. IDA comes over to him and lays her hand timidly on his shoulder.)*

IDA

I'd try to comfort you, Perry, but they ain't nothing I can say.

WASH

That's all right, Perry. I'll fix it. I got money and I'm going to help you out.

IDA

(Laughing bitterly)

But you won't nuther. What'd yer money be worth now? But you ain't got no money?

WASH

Hah! Hah! That's all right, that's all right.
(The habitual cunning look comes back to his face.)

IDA

You putt all yer money in the bank, and the bank's busted and all yer money's gone. Thank God, you're gitting yer justice in the end.

WASH

(Screaming)

What's that! You're trying to scare me! Heh! heh! But you won't, you won't.

TIM

Naw, she ain't. It's broke and they ain't a cent of money left, nothing but some old wuthless papers, and——

WASH

(Wailing)

Perry, Perry! You hear that, boy! Perry, make 'em quit it.

PERRY

(Rising mechanically)

Yeh, it's all gone, everything's gone. *(He starts toward the door.)*

IDA

Wait, Perry, I'm going up there and do what I can. (*She goes to the chest at the rear and gets out a cape.*)

WASH

That there man, he told me—he told me—— (*His words are lost in a throaty gurgling. Suddenly his head seems to rise from his body, his long right arm shoots out spasmodically, his fingers drawing in rigidly. PERRY and TIM move away from him in horror. IDA with her back to them is fastening her cape and putting on her shawl. There is a sharp burst of "guano bugles," beating of tin pans, ringing of cowbells, hisses, yells and screechings from the gang of serenaders outside. Several heavy fire crackers are shot off. IDA stands listening. Then the clamor stops and a chorus of voices begins singing:*

("Father is dead and laid in his grave,
Laid in his grave, laid in his grave.")

IDA

Listen there! Listen there, will you! (*She speaks in a dull husky voice.*)

("Father is dead and laid in his grave.

Oh! Oh! Oh!

There grewed a green apple tree over his head
Over his head——")

(*The song is suddenly shattered by the raucous voice of a youngster under the window.*)

VOICE

Counting yer dollars, air you, Wash Lucas! (*The door is given a contemptuous farewell kick and the gang marches off singing.*)

("There growed a green apple tree over his head.
Oh! Oh! Oh!")

IDA

(*Hurriedly tying her shawl*)

There's them young folks enjoying theyselves on Christmas Eve while we—— (*She turns and sees WASH as he slumps down helpless in his chair.*)

WASH

(*Calling to her in a low terror-stricken voice*)

Ida! Ida! (*She comes to him. He tries again to speak, but a second stroke has left him without the power of speech or movement. She gazes at him a moment and then turns away in despair before his pleading eyes.*)

IDA

Lord, Perry, it's another stroke! What can I do?
(*A faint voice calls back from the muffled singing in the lane.*)

VOICE

Heigh—you—Old Wash Lucas—Lucas!

CURTAIN

THE NO 'COUNT BOY¹

A Comedy of Negro Life

¹ Copyright, 1924, by Theatre Arts Monthly.

THE NO 'COUNT BOY

CAST OF CHARACTERS

As originally produced by The Studio Players, Little Theatre, Chicago, Illinois, December 6th, 7th, 13th and 14th, 1924.

PHEELIE	Phyllis Udell
ENOS, <i>her beau</i>	Alonzo Walters
THE NO 'COUNT BOY	Edgar Walters
AN OLD NEGRO WOMAN	Geraldine Udell

SCENE: Immediately before a Negro cabin.



Scene from "*The No 'Count Boy.*" PHEELIE (Geraldine Wilson Knight)
THE NO 'COUNT BOY (H. Ben Smith)
Boy: "We'll be splashing in de rain and shouting in de sun."

SCENE

THE scene is the small yard immediately before a Negro cabin. At the right front is a thick lilac bush with a bench beside it, and to the left from this a clumpy china tree with a rocking chair under it. At the left rear is a well, roughly boarded up, a chain and battered tin bucket hanging from a cross-piece above. In the back is the cabin. Rickety steps lead up to the door in the center. It is an afternoon late in summer.

When the curtain rises, PHEELIE, a neat Negro girl of seventeen, is sitting on the bench by the lilac tree looking through a book. She is dressed in cheap clothes—a white dress, white shoes and stockings.

Presently there is the sound of an approaching buggy in the lane off at the left and a voice calls, "Whoa!" PHEELIE listens a moment, and then, without turning her head, gives it a toss and goes on fingering the leaves of her book. ENOS comes in at the left and stands watching her. He is a short stocky Negro of twenty or more, dressed in a faded gray suit and black felt hat. His celluloid collar and scarlet tie shine out brilliantly against the black of his face.

ENOS

(In a drawling voice that now and then drops into a stammer)

Well, Pheelie, heah I is.

PHEELIE

(Looking up casually)

I see you is, and you's 'bout a hour early.

ENOS

But ain't you all dressed up to go?

PHEELIE

I's dressed up, but I ain't ready to go.

ENOS

(Dubiously)

Well, suh, now—I—I——

PHEELIE

I des' put on dese heah clothes 'caze it was so hot in de house wid my work duds on. *(He takes off his hat and discloses his naturally kinky hair combed back in a straight pompadour. He waits for her to notice it, but she keeps looking straight before her.)* Set down and rest yo'se'f. *(Somewhat ill at ease he sits down in the rocking-chair and watches her.)*

ENOS

I drapped by a little early hoping—a—mebbe you'd lak to take a small drive befo' church begun.

PHEELIE

(In the same cold voice)

Thanky, I don't believe I wants to take no drive. *(She becomes absorbed in her book.)*

ENOS

(Picking at the lining of his hat)

And I thought we mought stop by Buie's Creek and git some ice cream. *(He watches her narrowly.)*

PHEELIE

(After a moment)

Dat'd be nice, I reckon, but I don't want no ice cream nuther. *(She is silent again. He pulls nervously at his fingers, making the joints pop.)* And I'd be much obliged if you'd quit popping yo' finger j'int.

ENOS

(Jerking his hands apart and running his fingers over his greased hair)

'Scuse me, Pheelie. *(Somewhat timidly, but with a hidden touch of spirit.)* You—you don't seem glad to see me much.

PHEELIE

You didn't have no date to come over heah a hour befo' time.

ENOS

(Worried)

I knows it. But whut's de matter wid you? You ain't mad at me, is you?

PHEELIE

No, I ain't mad.

ENOS

Seems lak you'd druther look at dat old book dan talk to me.

PHEELIE

Mebbe I had. (*He feels his tie, twirls his hat, and spits softly through his teeth off to one side.*)

ENOS

Whut sorter book is it, Pheelie?

PHEELIE

Whut difference do it make to you? You ain't in-t'rested in no book.

ENOS

'Speck dat's right. But you sho' seems mo' tuk wid it dan anything I ever seed you have befo'.

PHEELIE

It's a fine pitchture book,

ENOS

Whah'd you git it?

PHEELIE

Dis mawning I was up to Mis' Ella's helping her hoe out de gyarden, and she told me a whole heap 'bout de places she and Mr. Jack went when dey was merried. And she give me dis book dat showed a passel of things.

ENOS

Hunh, dey had money to travel wid and enjoy deir-selves.

PHEELIE

She said one place dey went to was some sorter Falls or something lak dat, whah de water poured over in a great river and made a racket same as de world was busting up.

ENOS

Dat ain't nothing—mostly talk, I bet a dollar.

PHEELIE

(Closing her book with a bang)

Dat's whut you allus says. You don't care a straw 'bout gwine off and seeing things.

ENOS

(Sharply)

Ain't I done told you, honey bunch, we ain't gwine have no money to be traipsing round de world, not yit nohow.

PHEELIE

Don't you honey me no mo', I tells you.

ENOS

(Amazed)

Whut'n de name of Old Scratch ails you? Ain't I gut a right to honey you? and you engaged to me!

PHEELIE

Engaged to you! It's you engaged to me.

ENOS

Aw right, I's engaged to you den, and you knows mighty drot'n well I's glad to be too. Dey ain't no put-on wid me.

PHEELIE

I reckon you is glad. But you mess wid me and you won't be engaged to nothing.

ENOS

(Pleadingly)

Now, Pheelie, you better th'ow dat book in de far and come on and le's go foh a drive, it's stirred you all up. Come on, I's gut a mess of news to tell you.

PHEELIE

I ain't gwine on no drive. And I's 'bout decided not to go wid you to no meeting tonight nuther.

ENOS

(Alarmed)

Lawd, don't talk lak dat. Heah I's been waiting all de week foh dis Sadd'y night, and you ain't gwine back on me, is you?

PHEELIE

(Softening)

But, Enos, you's so samey, allus satisfied wid whut you has. You des' gits my goat.

ENOS
(*Humbly*)

If you means I ain't tuk wid no wild idees or sich 'bout trips way off yonder to see folks making fools of deirselves, den I is samey. But you listen heah, chile, dey ain't no meracles and sich off dere lak what you thinks. Onct I spent a good five dollars gwine on a 'scursion to Wilmington, and dey wa'n't a thing to see, not ha'f as much as dey is on dis heah farm.

PHEELIE
You gut to have eyes to see things. Some folks is natchly bawn blind.

ENOS
(*Placatingly*)

Well, mebbe when we's merried we'll take a little trip to Raleigh or Durham and see de street cyars and big buildings.

PHEELIE
But I wants to go furder, furder, clean to de mountains, and right on den mebbe.

ENOS
'Y craps, must think I gut a can of money buried somewhah.

PHEELIE
I don't nuther. Us could hobo, or walk part de way, des' fool along.

ENOS

(Laughing)

Hobo! Us'd hobo right into some white man's jail, dat's whut. And dey ain't nothing to dat walking business. We'd be a purty sight wid our feet blistered and somebody's bulldog tearing plugs out'n—well, you knows whut.

PHEELIE

(Ignoring his reply)

Setting dere looking through dat book I gut plumb sick and tar'd of you and all dis farming and sweating and gitting nowhah—sick of everything. And des looking at old lazy Lawrence dancing over the fields made me want to puke.

ENOS

(Eyeing her)

Honey chile, de last time I was heah you said you'd lak it working in de fields wid me and keeping de house and sich.

PHEELIE

I will, Enos, I reckons I will. But dat dere book set me to wanting to go off and git away.

ENOS

(Moving his chair over to her)

Listen to me. I knows I ain't fitten to breave on you, but I's gwine do my best by you. And whut you reckon? Mr. Pearson done told me today dat he's

having de lumber sawed to build our house. September she'll be done, den you'n me kin have business—kin see de preacher.

PHEELIE

Mr. Pearson's good to you awright.

ENOS

Ain't he! Dat's a man whut is a man. And it ain't all foh me he's building dat house. He laks you and says he'll be glad to have you on his place.

PHEELIE

(With signs of interest)

Whut kind of house is it—des' a shack wid a stick-and-dirt chimley?

ENOS

(Jubilantly)

Now I was des' a-hoping you'd ax dat. No, suh, it ain't no cow-shed you could th'ow a dog through de cracks—nunh—unh. It's gwine be a nice frame house wid a wide po'ch, and it'll be ceiled. And listen heah, it's gwine have wallpaper. And, honey, Mr. Pearson said he wanted you to come up a-Monday and help choose de pattern. *(He looks at her delightedly.)*

PHEELIE

(Her face brightening somewhat)

Oh, dat's so nice of you and him! *(She bows her head.)*

ENOS

Whut's de matter now?

PHEELIE

(Looking up with tears in her eyes)

You's too good to me, Enos, and I hadn't ort to allus be so onsatisfied.

ENOS

Sho', never mind now. *(He puts his arm around her.)*

PHEELIE

(Letting her hand rest on his hair)

Grannys alive! you done spent money to git yo' hair straightened.

ENOS

(With a kind of shamed joy)

Yeh, yeh, I has. But it was to celebrate a little.

PHEELIE

Dat's th'owing away a dollar and a half. In a little bit it'll be kinky ag'in.

ENOS

Course it will, but I thought you'd lak it while it lasts.

PHEELIE

(Laughing)

You sho' is a proud nigger. *(She kisses him quickly and stands away from him.)* Nunh—unh, I ain't

gwine do it no mo'. (*He drops reluctantly back into his seat, and she sits again on the bench.*)

ENOS

(*After a moment*)

You want to take dat little drive now?

PHEELIE

I mought, I guess.

ENOS

(*Slapping himself*)

Hot dog, den le's go, honey!

PHEELIE

(*Brightly*)

Lemme shet up de house and we'll be ready. Muh and Pap and all de kids is over to de ice cream supper at Uncle Haywood's befo' preaching. (*She starts up.*)

ENOS

(*Standing up*)

Aw right, honey babe. I sho' laks to see you jollied up. And I's gut anudder surprise foh you too.

PHEELIE

(*Stopping*)

You has?

ENOS

(*Mysteriously*)

Unh—hunh. But I'll tell you a little later.

PHEELIE

Naw, suh, tell me now—please.

ENOS

(Anxious to tell it)

In course I cain't stand out ag'in' you. Well, we ain't gwine drive behime no flop-yured mule dis time.

PHEELIE

We ain't! *(She starts towards the left to look out.)*

ENOS

Naw, suh, I's driving Egyp' today.

PHEELIE

Mr. Pearson's fine hoss!

ENOS

(Grinning)

Yeh, yeh, sho' is. I worked hard all de week, and dis mawning he come to me and axed me if I didn't want Egyp' to haul you wid tonight.

PHEELIE

(Looking off)

Dere he is. Ain't dat fine, and is he safe?

ENOS

Safe! Safe as a cellar. But, Lawd, he kin burn de wind!

PHEELIE

Goody-good. Now come help me shet de house.

ENOS

(As they go off at the left rear)

Mr. Pearson knows I ain't gwine beat his stock and bellows 'em lak some de niggers. I tells you, sugar lump, if we stays wid him and do right, some dese days we gwine have money to take dem dere trips you wants to.

(They have hardly disappeared when a slender Negro youth of sixteen or seventeen, barefooted and raggedly dressed in an old pair of overalls, shirt and torn straw hat, comes in at the right front and stands staring after them. He is whittling a green walking-stick. In a moment he pulls out a small mouth organ and begins playing a whirling jig.)

ENOS

(Coming back around the corner)

Who's dat playing to beat de band? *(He and PHEELIE come back into the yard. PHEELIE stares at the boy in delighted astonishment. Suddenly he winds up on a high note. As he beats the saliva out of the harp against his thigh, he bursts into a loud joyous laugh.)*

PHEELIE

Lawd, you kin play. Who is you?

ENOS

(With a touch of authority in his voice)

Whut you want heah? I ain't never seed you befo'.

BOY

(In a clear childish voice, as he looks at PHEELIE)

You ain't?

ENOS

Naw, I ain't. Whut you mean walking up in people's yards and acting lak you was home?

BOY

I thought I mought git me a drink from de well dere.

PHEELIE

Help yo'se'f. *(He draws water and drinks. ENOS and PHEELIE watch him.)*

ENOS

(In a low voice)

I bet he's some boy run away from home. Mebbe a tramp, I dunno.

PHEELIE

Dat boy a tramp! Hunh, he ain't no sich.

ENOS

I bet you on it. Looks s'picious to me.

BOY

(Coming back from the well and wiping his mouth with his sleeve)

I thought I mought git a bite to eat heah mebbe.
(He looks from one to the other, a lurking smile in his eyes.)

PHEELIE

(Uncertainly)

You mought.

ENOS

Lak as not de lady wants to know whah you come from and whut yo' business is befo' she 'gins to feed you.

BOY

(Looking at PHEELIE)

Would you?

PHEELIE

Yeh. Whut's yo' name?

BOY

(Laughing and blowing out a whiff of music)

Mostly I ain't gut no name. *(Beating the harp in his hand and scratching his leg with his toe.)* 'Way 'way back down dere—*(Pointing indefinitely behind him.)*—whah I come from some of 'em calls me Pete, but mostly dey calls me de No 'Count Boy.

ENOS

Why dey call you dat fo'?

Boy

(Laughing again)

'Caze I don't lak to work in de fields.

ENOS

Unh—hunh, unh—hunh, I s'picioned it.

Boy

S'picioned whut?

ENOS

Aw, nothing. Anyhow dat's a good name foh you, I bet. Who's boy is you and whah'd you come from 'way back down dere as you calls it?

Boy

(Quickly)

Cuts no wool who's boy I is. As foh whah I come from, I cain't tell you, bo, 'caze I dunno hardly. *(Hesitating and pointing off to the right.)* You see whah de sky come down to de earf—'way, 'way yonder?

ENOS

I sees it.

Boy

(Grinning to himself)

Well, I come from miles and miles beyont it. *(A kind of awe creeping into his words.)* Lawd, Lawd, how fuh has I come?

PHEELIE

You been all dat distance by yo'se'f?

BOY

Sho' has. And whut's mo' I walked it every jump.
(*Again he draws the harp across his lips in a breath of music, all the while watching them with bright eyes.*)

ENOS

Whah you gwine?

BOY

Des' gwine.

PHEELIE

You mean you ain't gut no special place in mind—
you des' hoboing along?

BOY

Dat's it, I reckon.

ENOS

How does you git yo' rations—beg foh it?

BOY

I pays foh it when I kin git 'em. 'Times I goes
hongry.

ENOS

(*Looking at him keenly*)

You ain't gut no money, has you?

BOY

(Cunningly)

Dat's awright. I pays foh it des' de same. *(He stops and looks at PHEELIE with big eyes.)* You's as purty as a pink, ain't you?

PHEELIE

(Turning away her head)

Why you ax dat?

ENOS

(Sharply)

You needn't be thinking you gwine git yo' supper on soft talk, hoss-cake.

BOY

(Still looking at PHEELIE)

Whut's yo' name?

PHEELIE

My name's Ophelia, but dey calls me Pheelie.

BOY

(Staring at her admiringly and cracking his palm against his thigh)

Dawg-gone! des' lak me foh de world. I's named one thing and dey calls me anudder.

ENOS

(With a hint of uneasiness)

Heah, I 'specks you better be gwine on up de road.

Me'n Miss Pheelie's des' ready to go out foh our afternoon drive, and we don't want to be bothered wid nobody's no 'count boy.

Boy

(His face falling)

I hates to hinder you, Miss Pheelie, and cain't I git nothing t'eat—a 'tater or anything?

PHEELIE

I 'speck I could give you a snack in yo' hand right quick.

Boy

No sooner said'n done, I hopes. And I pays you foh it too.

ENOS

(Almost sarcastically)

Gut yo' pockets full of silver and gold, apt as not.

Boy

Naw, suh, I gut something better new money. Heah she is. *(Holding up his harp.)* I plays you a piece or two pieces or three, and you gives me a bite and whut you pleases. *(In mock seriousness he pulls off his hat and addresses them.)* Ladies and ge'men, de fust piece I renders is called "De Dark-eyed 'Oman." It's music 'bout a 'oman whut had three little boys, and dey tuk sick and died one June night whilst de mockingbirds was singing. And allus adder

dat dey said she had a dark shadow in her dark eyes. (*He clears his throat, spits once or twice and lays the harp gently to his lips. Closing his eyes, he begins to play. ENOS stirs about him as the notes flood from the boy's mouth, and now and then he looks questioningly at PHEELIE's averted face. The boy's nostrils quiver, and he makes a sobbing sound in his throat. Tears begin to pour down his cheeks. After a moment he winds up with a flourish.*)

ENOS

(*Gruffly*)

Lawd Jesus, dat rascal kin blow!

BOY

(*Looking at PHEELIE as he wipes his eyes*)

I hopes you don't mind. Every time I blows dat piece I cries. (*PHEELIE glances up with moist eyes.*)

PHEELIE

I sho' don't mind. Whah you learn dat?

BOY

It's a made piece.

ENOS

Who made it?

BOY

Me.

ENOS

(Ironically)

Hunh, you mought!

BOY

(His face troubled)

You believes I made it, don't you, Miss Pheelie?

PHEELIE

Dat I do.

BOY

(His face clearing)

Aw right den. And I'll play you anudder piece foh dat snack of grub.

PHEELIE

Dat one's enough to pay.

ENOS

You sho' you didn't git no rations down de road?

BOY

Not nary a chaw.

PHEELIE

Ain't you had nothing all day?

BOY

Nothing but some branch water and a little bitsy bird I killed wid a rock and fried. *(His face takes on a sober look, and tears again glisten in his eyes.)*

ENOS

(Looking at him in astonishment)

You sho' is a quare fellow.

Boy

(Staring up at the sky)

Dat little bird was singing so sweet and ruffling his breast in de wind, and I picked up a rock an des' th'owed devilish lak, never thought I'd hit him. But dat's de way it is—when you thinks you won't, you does, and I kilt him.

PHEELIE

And den you et him?

Boy

(Wiping his eyes on his sleeves)

I was so hongry den, and I built a speck of fire and baked him. (*Wretchedly.*) Won't it better foh me to eat him dan foh maggits to git at him?

PHEELIE

'Twas dat.

Boy

(Mournfully)

But I sho felt bad 'bout dat little bird. I cain't git his chune out'n my haid. He sot on dat limb and would give a long call and den a short one—(*Imitating on his harmonica.*)—des lak dat.

ENOS

You's a mighty big fellow to be crying over a bird, seems lak to me.

PHEELIE

Enos, you quit dat making fun.

BOY

When I come through de creek back dere, a good-god was pecking in a high daid tree, and he turnt his haid sideways and whickered at me. I heahd him say he gwine ha'nt me foh killing dat bird.

ENOS

I swear! (PHEELIE *gives him a cutting look, and he stops his laughing.*)

BOY

I've hearn dat dem good-gods is old women turnt to birds 'caze dey was weeked. And you see dey's still gut on little old red caps.

PHEELIE

Dey won't hurt you.

ENOS

Pshaw, dey ain't nothing but great big sapsuckers.

BOY

How you know? Des' de same dis'n scolded me foh th'owing dat rock. I could tell it in his talk and de way he looked at me.

PHEELIE

You didn't mean to do it nohow, and you was hongry too. Now play us some mo'.

BOY

I 'speck mebbe den it's aw right, I 'speck so. Now I plays you my udder piece to pay you plenty foh my eatings.

PHEELIE

'Tain't dat, 'tain't dat. We laks to heah you. I'll feed you foh nothing.

BOY

Well, listen to dis, folkses. (*He again pulls off his hat and makes his stage bow.*) Ladies and ge'men, dis is a talking piece I's gwine render. It's 'titled "De Coffin Song," and tells 'bout a nice gal whut went away from home all dressed out in white and died, and dey sont her body back to her Muh and Pap. Dis heah's de Coast-Line coming down de track on a dark and rainy night wid her coffin on boa'd. (*He closes his eyes and begins blowing the choo-kerr-choo of a starting train. He intersperses his blowing with short speeches.*)

De rain is beating on de window panes and everybody is mo'nful.

(*The choo-kerr-chooing takes on a sobbing note, and the speed of the train increases.*)

De old man and de old 'oman is at de station waiting foh deir daughter's body, her dey loved so well, oh, her dey loved so well. "Don't cry, honey, she gone

to heaven," de old man say, Lawd, Lawd, de old man say. Den he heah dat coffin-blow.

(A long mournful wail of the engine's whistle follows, swallowed up in the growing speed of the locomotive. He opens his eyes and begins to chant forth his bits of dialogue.)

Now she's balling de jack 'cross de river trustle.

(He quivers and sings with the straining timbers of the bridge.)

Heah she is passing by de gravel-pit. How she goes by, how she goes by! lak a great black hoss, a great black hoss! And now she's blowing foh de crossing.

(The whistle moans again.)

Her Muh and Pap's on de flatfom at de station and dey feel deir hearts in deir moufs at de crying of dat train, Lawd, Lawd, de crying of dat train!

(Again he gives the coffin-blow, long and heart-breaking.)

De train she slow up.

(The choo-kerr-chooing slowly stops.)

Dey takes out de coffin and flowers and puts her in a huss, and dey all drives off slow, slow, lak dis.

(He plays a sort of dead march and stalks back and forth across the yard.)

Den de next day dey takes her to de graveyard, de lonesome graveyard, and de preacher preach, and de people sing, shout—shout hallelujah—de preacher preach and de people sing, shouting glory to de lamb. And den dey 'gin th'ow dirt in on her.

(He imitates the thump, thump of clods falling on the coffin.)

Den de favver and muvver and sisters and bruvvers
all cry out loud. Her Pap cries lak dis.

(He gives forth a long deep groan.)

And de sisters and bruvvers lak dis.

(A medley of weeping sounds.)

And de muvver cry lak dis.

(A high piercing shriek.)

And den dey roach up de grave and de preacher
make prayer—"Lawd, Lawd Jesus, have mercy upon
us!" Den dey all go off and dey ain't nothing left
'cepting a crow in a high scraggly pine a-saying:

*(He mingles his music with a raucous
h-a-r-r-c-k, h-a-r-r-c-k.)*

Den adder dat when night come, dark and rainy
night, de last thing is a small wind in de bushes lak
dis:

*(A trembling flute-like note rises, bubbles and
disappears. He beats the harp against his hand
and looks uncertainly at ENOS and PHEELIE,
the tears wetting his cheeks.)*

ENOS

(Presently)

I cain't deny you gut de world beat handling dat
baby, but whut'n de name o' God makes you cry so
much?

BOY

(Watching PHEELIE's bowed head)

When I plays dat piece I feel so lonesome lak I
cain't help crying, I allus cries.

ENOS

I's seed folks cry when deir people died, but, Lawd, I never seed no sich cry-baby as you.

Boy

You's hard-hearted. Look at Miss Pheelie, she's crying.

ENOS

Help my life! Whut ails you, Pheelie?

PHEELIE

(Hurriedly drying her eyes)

Don't make no fun of me, Enos. I des' had de blues ag'in.

ENOS

(Patting his hat anxiously)

Heah, don't you git to feeling dat a-way no mo', honey. Le's go on wid our drive.

Boy

You calls her honey!

ENOS

Dat I do. She's my gal, dat's whut. And listen to me—I don't want no no 'count fellow come piddling by wid a harp and wild talk to git her upsot.

Boy

(Unhappily)

I didn't know you was her man. I—I thought she

was too purty and lak a angel foh dat. (PHEELIE looks at him tearfully and he gazes back warmly.)

ENOS

(Angrily)

Look out, nigger, mind whut you's up to!

PHEELIE

Enos, you quit talking to dat boy lak dat.

ENOS

(Coming up to her and catching her by the arm)

Come on now and let dat fellow go on whah he's started.

PHEELIE

(Springing up)

Turn me a-loose. He's gwine stay right heah if he wants to and eat and sleep to boot.

ENOS

(Hesitating a moment and then flaring out, his timidity and slowness gone)

De hell you say! (He turns suddenly towards the boy and points off to the left.) You see 'way, 'way yonder in de west whah de sun is setting in de tops of dem long-straw pines?

Boy

(Questioningly)

Yeh, yeh, I sees it.

ENOS

(Moving towards him)

Well, I wants you to git in dat road and in three minutes start dere.

PHEELIE

(Putting herself quickly before him)

He ain't gwine, I tells you.

BOY

(Emboldened by PHEELIE'S protection)

You means you wants to run me off befo' I gits any rations?

ENOS

I don't keer whedder you gits any rations or not. I wants you to leave heah befo' you gits Pheelie all tore up wid yo' foolish notions. *(Snapping.)* You better git from heah!

BOY

(Swinging his stick before him and smiling with weak grimness)

Ah—hah—I ain't gwine. *(ENOS makes another step towards him.)* Don't you come towards me. I'll split yo' haid open wid dis heah stick. *(ENOS stops and eyes him cautiously. The boy holds his stick in trembling readiness.)*

PHEELIE

(Getting between them)

I tells you, Enos Atkins, you ain't gwine harm nary

a hair of dis boy's head. You do and I'll scratch yo' eyes out apt as not.

ENOS

God A'mighty! done hyp'otized wid him a'ready, is you? (*In a wheedling tone.*) Now, boy, cain't you see how 'tis wid me? We was des' ready to go off to church, and heah you pops up and sets yo'se'f in 'twixt us. (*He feels in his pocket and pulls out a dollar.*) Heah, take dis dollar and go on. You kin buy enough grub wid it to last you a week.

Boy

(*Breaking into a loud derisive laugh*)

Ain't he a sight trying to har me off from his gal!

ENOS

Dem dere laughs is lakely gwine be tacks in yo' coffin. (*The boy closes his eyes in merriment. With a quick movement Enos snatches his stick from him.*) Now see'f you don't strak a trot up dat road. (*He puts out his arm and pushes PHEELIE back. Egypt is heard off the left pawing the ground and shaking his bridle.*) Whoa, Egypt!

Boy

(*Half whimpering*)

Don't hit me wid dat stick.

ENOS

I ain't gwine hit you if you lights a rag out'n heah

dis minute. Scat, or I'll wring yo' neck. Make yo'se'f sca'ce, nigger.

PHEELIE

Let him 'lone, let him 'lone, I tells you!

Boy

You better go tend to yo' hoss, bo. I heah him trying to git loose.

ENOS

(Looking appealingly at PHEELIE)

Egyp's gitting restless, Pheelie. You 'bout ready to be driving now? *(He steps to the left and calls.)* Whoa! whoa dere, Egyp'! Come on, Pheelie, and le's go.

PHEELIE

(Shaking her head determinedly)

I ain't gwine on no drive wid you, and dat's my last say.

ENOS

Oh, hell fiah! *(He lowers his stick. At the left he turns and speaks.)* You des wait heah, you little pole-cat, and I'll fix you yit. *(He hurries out.)*

Boy

(Turning boldly back into the yard)

Hunh, dat nigger ain't nothing but bluff.

PHEELIE

And he ain't gwine make you leave nuther. You stay raght wid him.

BOY

He thinks you's gitting to laking me, dat's whut he thinks. (*He falls to staring at her intently.*)

PHEELIE

Why you look at me lak dat?

BOY

(*Shyly*)

How old is you?

PHEELIE

Seventeen.

BOY

(*Joyously*)

Is? Den we's des' de same age. Cain't—cain't I call you Pheelie?

PHEELIE

(*Looking at the ground*)

Yeh, yeh, you kin.

BOY

I feels des' lak I knowed you all my life, and I ain't never seed nobody lak you in all my progueings, nobody—and I's travelled a heap too.

PHEELIE

And you's seed a monstrous lot whah you travelled,
ain't you? Yeh, you has, I bet.

Boy

I has dat—Lawd, Lawd!

PHEELIE

(Dropping into the rocking-chair)

Has you seed any big rivers and waters and sich?

Boy

Rivers! Lawd, yeh!

PHEELIE

Has you been by a place whah a great river pours
over a steep hill roaring lak de judgment day?

Boy

*(Dropping on his knees and marking in the dirt as he
ponders)*

I dunno—Yeh, yeh, dat river was two miles wide
and you had to stop yo' yurs in a mile of it.

PHEELIE

Go on, go on, tell me some mo'. Has you been in
any big towns?

Boy

Has I? I's been in towns dat had streets so long dey
won't no coming to de end of 'em.

PHEELIE

Was dey many people dere?

Boy

People! People! (*He rolls over on the ground at the remembrance of it and then sits up.*) All kinds and sizes. People running, people walking, some wearing diamont dresses and gold shoes. Rich, my, my, how rich! Ortymobiles as big as dat house wid hawns dat jar lak a earfquake and b'iler busting all to onct.

PHEELIE

(A little dubiously)

Aw——

Boy

Hit's so. And street cyars running wid nothing pulling or pushing 'em. And buildings so high dat de moon breshes de top. High! Lawd, Lawd, how high! And people hauling money wid trains, big train loads whah dey keeps it in a big house wid a school breaking of folks to gyard it.

PHEELIE

I been looking at pitchtures in dis book, but nothing fine as dat. (*She brings the book and shows it to him.*)

Boy

(Somewhat disturbed)

Yeh, I's gut a book lak dat. (*He begins picking his teeth meditatively with a straw.*) It was give to me

by a peddling man. (*Smiling wisely.*) But dat was befo' I went out travelling foh myself. Lawd, Lawd, 'pared to what I's seed in New Yawk dat book ain't nothing.

PHEELIE

New Yawk! You been dere?

Boy

Dat I has. She's a long ways yonder too, mebbe two hundred miles, who knows? But, Pheelie, dat's de place to go, everything easy, people good to you, nothing to do but eat ice cream and mebbe now and den drink lemonade—and see people, people! worse'n de fair at Dunn. Never seed sich a mess of people. (*ENOS is heard quieting his horse.*)

PHEELIE

How'd you travel so fuh and pay yo' way? Must take a lot of money.

Boy

I walked, dat's how, bum my way. And when I gits hongry I plays my harp.

PHEELIE

Whah you sleep?

Boy

You don't know nothing 'bout travelling, does you? I sleeps on de warm ground. Come sunset, I stops in

a hollow and breaks down bushes and rakes up pine-straw and sleeps lak a log. And in de mawning I wakes and sees de jew on everything and heahs de birds singing, and I lies dere a while and practice on my harp. Den I's off down de road breaving de fine air and feeling des' as happy as I kin.

PHEELIE

(Vehemently)

I done told Enos we could do lak dat. I sho' has told him time and ag'in.

BOY

Would you lak to live dat a-way?

PHEELIE

Unh—hunh, yeh, oh, yeh, I would.

BOY

(Earnestly)

Why cain't you, Pheelie?

PHEELIE

(Twisting her hands nervously)

I dunno—I wants to—I do wants to go and keep on gwine.

BOY

(Leaning quickly forward)

Pheelie, Pheelie, come on wid me and go tromping through de world. You kin leave dat bench-leg Enos behime.

PHEELIE

(*Turning impulsively towards him and then dropping her head*)

I cain't do it, I's 'fraid to. (ENOS *slips in at the left rear and watches them.*)

BOY

I tell you we would have de best time gwine. Come on and go wid me.

PHEELIE

(*Hesitating*)

I—mought do it—I's half tempted to do it.

BOY

(*Catching her hand*)

I tells you whut—how 'bout me waiting out in de woods dere till dark comes down and den you kin put on a old dress and j'ine me?

PHEELIE

(*Pulling her hand unwillingly from him*)

Dat'd be fine—fine, but wouldn't folks raise cain?

BOY

Let 'em. Whut you'n me keer? We'll be splash-ing in de rain and shouting in de sun. And we'll step along togedder, and I'll hold yo' purty little hand and you'll hold mine, and I'll teach you to sing songs. I knows a bushel of purty ones. And den I'll learn you how to blow my harp. And we'll slip down de roads

at sunrise and sunset, singing and blowing de finest chunes dey is. Please'm say you'll go wid me.

PHEELIE

(With shining eyes)

You has de purtiest talk of any man or boy I ever seed, and, oh, I wish—wish—— *(With sudden abandon.)* Yeh, yeh, I will—I will, I'll go. *(Ecstatically he touches her arm and looks straight into her eyes.)*

BOY

(Cooingly)

Birdie mine, birdie mine. *(He stands up and bends over her chair.)*

PHEELIE

(Her face alight as she leans her head against him)

Oh, it makes my haid swim to think of all we's gwine see and heah. *(He timidly puts his arm over her shoulder. ENOS throws his stick behind him, springs forward and snatches the BOY away from PHEELIE.)*

ENOS

Heah, you low-down rascal, trying to steal my gal, is you! Oh, yeh, I been heahing whut you said. *(His nostrils dilating.)* And I's gwine give you a kick in de seat of yo' britches dat'll send you whah you's gwine.

BOY

(Retreating behind PHEELIE)

I ain't trying to steal her nuther. She don't keer nothing foh you and wants to go on wid me.

ENOS

Dat's a lie, you little ficey fool, and you better look out befo' I gives you de lock-jaw.

BOY

She much as said she don't love you, now den.

ENOS

You didn't say dat, did you, Pheelie?

PHEELIE

I dunno whah I loves you or not.

ENOS

(Turning savagely upon the boy)

Damn yo' soul, I gut a notion to ham-string you. *(He makes a movement towards the boy, who darts over to the left, sees his walking-stick, and seizes it.)* You des' come heah rolling off yo' lies by de yard and tear up everything! Why don't you leave? Want me to bring out a fedder bed and wash yo' feet and sing to you and fan you and put you to sleep, does you? *(Jumping forward.)* I'll put you to sleep!

BOY

(Falling quickly behind PHEELIE and drawing his stick)

You make anudder move at me and I'll scrush yo' skull.

PHEELIE

(Crying out)

Enos, stop dat, stop dat!

ENOS

(Sarcastically)

Yeh, and who's you to order me—you lost every ray of sense you ever had! Wouldn't you be a purty fool running off wid dis heah woods-colt and sleeping in de jambs of fences and old hawg beds and scratching fleas lak a mangy hound! *(His voice rising high in wrath.)* Dat you would. And in winter weather you'd have yo' shirt-tail friz to you hard as arn. You'd be a sight for sore eyes!

PHEELIE

Shet up.—Boy, I wouldn't let him call me no woods-colt.

BOY

(Weakly)

Don't you call me dat.

ENOS

(Taking off his coat)

Call you dat! I ain't started yit. I's gwine twist off bofe yo' yurs and make you eat 'em widdout no salt. Hell, you ain't gut no mo' backbone dan a ground-puppy.

BOY

(Trembling and clinging to his stick)

Pheelie, Pheelie, don't let him git at me.

PHEELIE

Don't you hurt dat boy, I tells you ag'in.

ENOS

(Laughing brutally)

Hurt him! I's gwine crucify him. *(He begins circling PHEELIE. The BOY keeps on the opposite side. ENOS reaches out and pulls PHEELIE behind him.)*
Now, my little son of a gun, whah is you?

BOY

(In desperation raising his stick)

Don't you come neah me. *(ENOS makes a dart at him. The BOY starts to flee, but as ENOS clutches him, he turns and brings his stick awkwardly down on his head. ENOS staggers and falls to his knees.)*

PHEELIE

(Looking on in amazement a moment and then screaming)

Lawd, you's kilt Enos! *(She stands uncertainly, and then runs and holds him to her.)*

BOY

(In a scared voice as he drops his stick)

Muhcy, whut's I gwine do? Is—is you hurt, Enos?
(ENOS groans.)

PHEELIE

Git out'n heah, you, you. You's murdered my husband. Enos, Enos, honey baby, is you hurt bad? *(He groans again and she helps him to a chair.)*

ENOS

(Twisting his head from side to side)

Hurt? Nothing but a little crack. Dat lizard ain't strong enough to kill a flea wid a sludge hammer. *(He suddenly whirls around and runs his tongue out, snarling at the BOY.)* Ya-a-a-h! *(The BOY bounds backwards and, tripping over the bench, falls sprawling on the ground.)* See dere, blowing my breaf on him th'ows him into fits. *(The BOY lies stretched out still.)*

PHEELIE

Oh, my Lawdy, you—I believes he's daid or something!

ENOS

(Trying to hide his fear)

Sho' nothing but de breaf knocked out'n him.

PHEELIE

(Shrilly, as she bends above the boy)

He's hurt, I tells you. Po' boy. *(Turning towards ENOS.)* Whut if you's kilt him?

ENOS

(Rubbing his head)

Shet up, he ain't hurt bad.

PHEELIE

You hateful mule-beating rascal, he is hurt. *(Moaning over him.)* Oh, my sweet honey-boy.

BOY

(Sitting up)

Jesus, dat fall jarred de wind out'n my stomach. *(Suddenly getting to his feet and eyeing ENOS fearfully.)* Don't let dat man make at me.

PHEELIE

I don't reckon he will. You gi'n him a dost to last foh a while.

ENOS

(Standing up)

A dost! Hunh, he cain't faze me wid no little tap on de skull. *(He begins rolling up his sleeves. There is a hail off at the right front.)* And now I rolls up my sleeves foh de hawg-killing.

PHEELIE

You all stop dat rowing now. Yonder comes somebody. *(The BOY reaches down and gets his harp out of the dirt.)*

ENOS

Who is dat? Some old 'oman in a steer cyart.

BOY

(Looking up hastily)

Lawd Jesus, dat's—who's dat! Hide me, people, hide me quick so's she cain't git to me. *(He looks around him in terror.)* Whah must I go?

PHEELIE

Why you skeered of her?

BOY

Pheelie, put me somewhah, civer me quick!

PHEELIE

Drap down on yo' knees, she's coming up de paf.
Better git behime de house mebbe.

BOY

(*On his knees*)

And if she axes foh me, don't you tell her.

PHEELIE

We'll tell her we ain't seed hair nor hide of you.
But I cain't see why you so tore up. (*He crawls rapidly off at the left rear around the house.*) Now, Enos, you keep yo' mouf closed. Dey's something up—dat boy 'fraid so.

ENOS

Dey is something up, and my s'picions is coming to de top.

OLD WOMAN

(*Calling off the right front*)

Heigho!

PHEELIE

Heigho! (*A stout old negress, dressed in rough working clothes, comes in at the right. She carries a long heavy switch in her hand with which she cuts at the ground as she talks.*)

OLD WOMAN

How you all come on?

PHEELIE

Well as common, and how does you?

OLD WOMAN

Well, I thanky. I's looking my boy—seen anything of him?

PHEELIE

(Slowly)

Whut sorter boy?

OLD WOMAN

Lawd, take me all day to gi'n you a pitchture of him. He's des' de no'countest fellow ever was bawn. He goes round playing a harp, and he's not des right in his haid. He talks wild 'bout being off and travelling everywhah, and he ain't never been out'n Hornett County. Gut all dat mess out'n pitchture books and sich. *(A delighted grin begins to pass over ENOS' face. PHEELIE looks dejectedly at the ground.)*

PHEELIE

(In a choked voice)

I ain't seed him nowhah.

OLD WOMAN

(Watching her closely)

I whupped him t'udder day 'caze he so sorry, and he run off. And when I ketches him dis time I's gwine cyore him foh good and all. You say you ain't seed him?

PHEELIE
(*Looking up*)

Naw'm.

OLD WOMAN
(*Eyeing her*)

Dat's quair. I thought I seed somebody lak him standing heah in de yard. Last house down de road said he passed dere a hour ago, and dey ain't no road to turn off.

PHEELIE
(*Persistently*)

Naw'm, I ain't seed him.

(*Unseen by PHEELIE, ENOS makes a signal to the WOMAN that the BOY is behind the house. Cunningly she goes on talking to PHEELIE.*)

PHEELIE
(*Looking off*)

Mebbe he went by when we won't looking. (*The WOMAN darts around the house and is heard crying out.*)

OLD WOMAN
Ah—hah—heah you is, heah you is!

PHEELIE
How'd she find out he's dere? (*There is the sound of blows followed by loud crying.*)

ENOS

Listen at him cry, de baby!

PHEELIE

(Who has started towards the rear)

Quit yo' laughing. *(She chokes with sobs.)* You set her on him, dat's whut you done. And I'll help him out, she shain't beat him so. *(She meets the OLD WOMAN coming in leading the BOY by the collar. He is crying like a child.)*

OLD WOMAN

(Yelling at him)

Dry up! *(He stops his sobbing and looks off ashamed.)* Now ain't you a mess to be running off and leaving me all de cotton to chop! *(Looking around her.)* Well, we's gut to be moving, and I's gwine gi'n you a beating whut is a beating when you gits home.

ENOS

Whah you live?

OLD WOMAN

Down neah Dukes.

ENOS

Oh-ho, I thought mebbe from yo' boy's talk you was from New Yawk or de moon or somewhah.

OLD WOMAN

I be bound he's been lying to you. He cain't tell de trut. De devil must a gut him in de dark of de

moon. (*She brings the switch across his legs. He shouts with pain.*) Step on now! (*He struggles against her and holds back.*)

BOY

Pheelie, Pheelie, help me, cain't you?

PHEELIE

(*Raising a face filled with wrath*)

Help you! Dat I won't. (*Coming up to him and glaring in his face.*) You dirty stinking rascal, why you fool me so?

OLD WOMAN

(*Giving him another cut*)

You put a move on you or I'll frail de stuffing out'n you. (*They move off towards the right front, he looking back and holding out his hands to PHEELIE.*)

BOY

Pheelie, don't turn ag'in' me so. Pheelie! (*They go out.*)

ENOS

(*Going up to PHEELIE*)

Honey, don't—don't be mad now. See, if it hadn't been foh me, apt as not you'd a-let dat little fool gut you to gwine off wid him. (*PHEELIE bursts into wild sobs. He pulls her head against his breast, but she shakes herself from him. The loud voice of the OLD WOMAN is heard outside.*)

OLD WOMAN

You git in dat cyart or I'll Pheelie you!

PHEELIE

I don't want—I ain't never gwine to speak to you ag'in! Oh, he's done gone! (*She runs to the right and calls down the road.*) Heigh, Boy! Boy!

BOY

(*His voice coming back high and faint*)

Pheelie-ee-ee! (PHEELIE falls on the bench, sobbing in uncontrollable grief. ENOS stands looking at her with a wry smile while he gingerly rubs his bruised head. After a moment he goes over to her and puts his arms around her. They are still around her when the curtain falls.)

CURTAIN

THE OLD MAN OF EDENTON¹

A Melodrama of Witchcraft Times

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THE OLD MAN OF EDENTON

CAST OF CHARACTERS

*As originally produced by The Carolina Playmakers
at The Play-House, Chapel Hill, North Carolina,
February 11 and 12, 1920.*

JOE JULES, *reputed witch-man*, George Denny
MUMBO, *his mute African slave*,

Frank John Haronian

THE TOWN CONSTABLE, *of Edenton*,

Le Grand Everett

THE NOTARY, *of Edenton*,

Almonte Howell

A MINISTER, *of the Church of England*,

Charles McCollum

THE LAST CHARACTER,

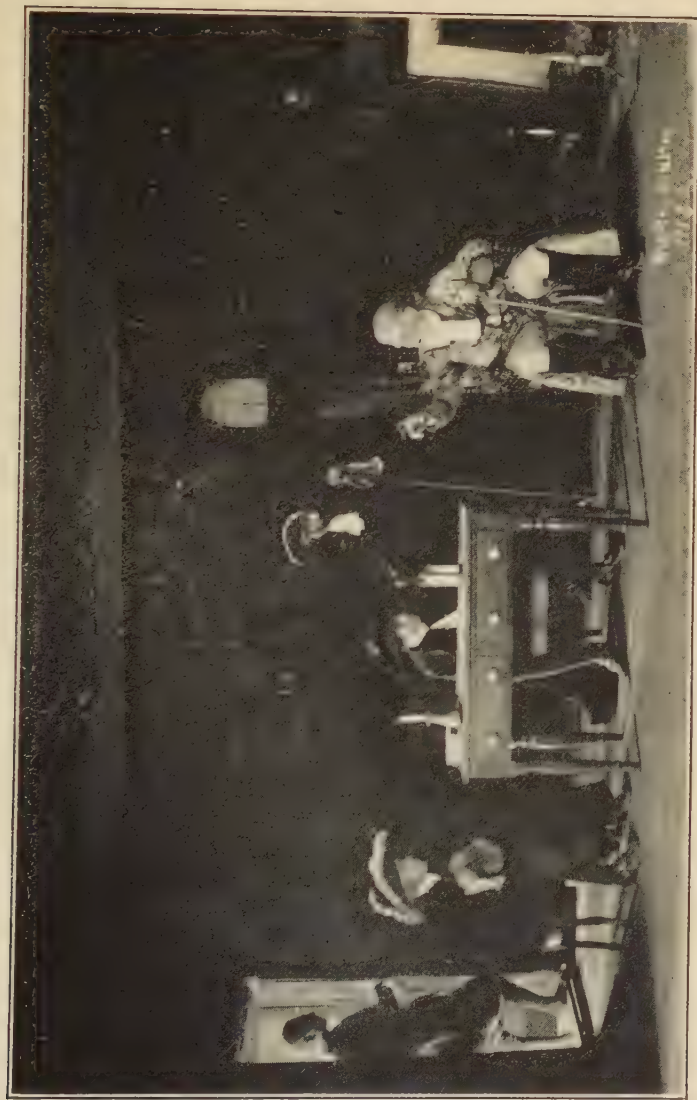
Melissa Hankins

SCENE: The old man's house on Salmon Creek outside
of Edenton, North Carolina.

TIME: A winter night in 1750.

Elizabeth A. Lay and Sara B. Howell, Assistant
Directors.

*The motif of this play is an old one, and has been
used by different novelists. Cable uses it in two of
his stories. There is nothing historical about any of
the characters or the action.*



Scene from *The Old Man of Edenton*. MUMBO (F. J. Haronian); A MINISTER (Charles McCollum); THE NOTARY (Almonette C. Howell); TOWN CONSTABLE (Le Grand Everett); OLD JULES (George V. Jenny)

SCENE

THE drawing-room of JOE JULES' home on Salmon Creek just outside of Edenton, as Edenton was in 1750. The room is large and well-furnished, somewhat pretentious in the old style, but having the appearance of age and neglect. The floor is richly carpeted. The walls above high dark wainscoting are plastered and tinted a dark red. Old dust-covered portraits hang in a line on the walls. Dust and cobwebs are everywhere.

In the center of the right wall is a door leading to the outside, and at the rear in that corner a heavy mahogany sideboard with a few glasses and whiskey bottles on it. The top of the sideboard is used as a bookcase. In the center at the rear a door leads into a hallway. To the right of the door is a tall silent clock, and to the left a queer idol about four feet high, built on a pedestal. The idol is crudely made of clay, with an enormous red-stained mouth, protruding tongue, four gleaming fangs lifted as if to bite, two small fiery eyes and long bushy black hair made of feathers and twigs. Its taloned hands are stretched out as if to grasp something. Around its neck and wrists a number of fetishes are strung—glass beads, frog's legs, and boar's teeth.

Above the door is nailed a stuffed deer's head with branching antlers. In the left corner is a spinet, above

it a large window through which the swaying branches of the cypress trees can be seen. At the left in the center is a huge fireplace with a dim bed of coals on the hearth, the glow illuminating a heavy and richly fashioned pair of bronze andirons. The fireplace is surrounded by ornate mantelwork, decorated with an intricate network of carving. On the mantel are two brass flower-pots, from the tops of which dead rosebuds and grasses show their heads. Above on the wall hang two crossed swords, a scabbard on either side.

In the center of the room is a heavy square table, on which stands a bronze candlestick with a candle in it. A leather bound book cracked with age is lying beside it. Several old Dutch chairs are placed about the room. Everything has the appearance of age, but age that still retains something of the glory of past days.

The curtain rises on the room, dimly lighted by the flickering fire. Through the gloom the idol glares out with his fiery eyes and glistening fangs. The low sighing of the wind in the cypress trees can be heard. The old portraits on the walls look like real people in the plunging shadows. On the right of the room is a huge dark blotch, cast by the figure of OLD JULES as he sits before the fire.

He is an old man, as well as can be seen in the dim light, of powerful frame. He has a fierce yet tender face, furrowed and unshaven, and long unkempt grey hair. He is wrapped in a heavy dressing-gown of rich faded, dark-colored brocade, with broad sleeves, straight rolled over cuffs having frilled lace trimming at the edges. Beneath the loose-fitting gown show his

nankeen trousers and embroidered waistcoat of dull yellow. He wears felt slippers and grey stockings.

Motionless, he sits in an old rocker, his great hands clasped over a heavy knobbed cane, looking straight into the fire. All is still as death, save for the low whispering of the wind, when slowly a low moaning whine rises from somewhere in the rear below and dies away. OLD JULES bows his head on his hands with a long sigh and a heavy lurch of his shoulders. The whine comes up into the room again. He raises his head and turns towards the rear.

OLD JULES

(In a voice that trembles slightly from feebleness)

Yes, yes, it'll be soon—soon. (He turns again to the fire, his cane making a tapping sound as he moves. Presently he raises his head and calls.) Mumbo! Mumbo!

(A noise of footsteps is heard outside. MUMBO enters at the right. He is a tall powerfully built African of about forty, dressed in a loose, short sleeved robe of coarse dun material that comes just a little below his knees with a red cord tied about his waist. His bared head is covered with thick kinky hair. He wears two enormous bone earrings and a huge nose ring. His lower lip is slit open, giving his mouth a frightful appearance. Each cheek bears a crescent-shaped scar. Heavy mud-stained shoes and shabby red stockings complete his dress. Other than the adornments on ears and nose, he wears several

fetishes around his neck, most noticeable of all being a turtle-shell tied with a leather string. His arms are clasped with several leather bracelets.)

(As Mumbo passes before his idol, he bows nearly to the floor, letting his hands hang down in abject reverence. He stands before the old man, with bowed head. JULES speaks again.) Mumbo, have you heard them coming? *(MUMBO shakes his head, OLD JULES mutters.)* They'll come though—they'll come though—— Have you unlocked the gate? *(MUMBO nods assent. Loudly.)* Get the glass ready! *(He points to the sideboard.)* There! *(Though his tone is still commanding he speaks in a low weak voice. He stares straight before him as if he already sees enacted before his very eyes some horrible deed he intends perpetrating.)*

(MUMBO falls on his knees before him, raising his hands in supplication, all the while making a gibbering noise with his mutilated mouth. JULES raises his cane and points imperiously.) No! Go—— We've sent for them, and we must be ready. *(MUMBO turns and falls before his idol, holding his hands out in prayer to it, and bowing his head to the floor several times. JULES hears him at his prayers and turns.)* You poor dumb African dog! Get up! Your prayers can't help us now. They're coming—soon—soon. *(Loudly.)* The glass!

(Trembling, MUMBO rises and goes to the sideboard. He gets a tumbler, fills it with water and brings it to JULES who pulls something from his waistcoat and

drops it into the water. Then he places the glass on the mantel. He points to the fire and MUMBO goes out at the rear door and brings in wood. Again the whining noise is heard. JULES speaks with infinite sadness.)

Yes, yes! A little while—a little while! (To MUMBO.) This is the worst night of all.

(He points down through the rear of the room. MUMBO goes out at the rear. Almost instantly he reappears at the door, carrying a huge long-necked gourd made into a musical instrument. Three strings are stretched from pegs fastened in the neck of the gourd across a bridged opening in the basin part and fastened to a peg fitted into the bottom of the gourd. He sits just inside the door and begins a weird barbaric tune, that starts in a high minor key and falls, rises and falls, pizzicato-like. Soon he begins to make a queer humming sound in his throat as an accompaniment, swaying from side to side with the music. The whining from below gradually ceases. MUMBO plays more and more softly until the music is no longer heard.)

Voices are heard outside. MUMBO goes out at the rear and puts up the instrument, always bowing as he passes before the idol. He returns almost immediately. There is a knock at the door, then a voice, thin and high.)

I don't like it much here.

(Another voice, very deep.) It's all right, I reckon.

(*A third voice, smooth and easy.*) The Lord is with us in this.

(*The knock is repeated and followed by a kick at the door.*)

OLD JULES

Mumbo, I'm going down there. (*He points through the rear of the stage, MUMBO's hands flutter before his face in fear.*) I'm going down there to make ready. Help me up. (*MUMBO moves away in rebellion, but JULES reaches out and catches hold of him and pulls himself up. MUMBO with his head bowed points to the door. JULES looks at him and then at the idol.*) Cover him up, then, if you don't want strangers to see your idol. Then light the candles.

(*He slowly totters out at the rear. MUMBO, lowering his head, goes to the left corner, gets a dark blanket and covers the idol. Then he lights the candles. Meanwhile the knock is repeated and the heavy voice cries out.*)

What in the devil is the trouble in there?

(*The door is kicked again, MUMBO hurries to open it. THE CONSTABLE, about to enter, starts back in alarm. Then he speaks reassuringly.*)

THE CONSTABLE

Oh, I see, the old African slave!

(*THE CONSTABLE, MINISTER and NOTARY come in, all wearing clothes in the fashion of the time. THE CONSTABLE, a dark powerful man*

of about forty, is dressed in a green coat made of frieze, nankeen trousers, grey stockings, stout shoes fastened with imitation silver buckles which cover at least half of the foot from toe to instep. The trousers are tied at the knee with a ribbon of the same color, the ends reaching down nearly to the ankles. His hair is long, matted and streaked with grey, standing in a mop on the top of his head. His clothes are dirty and the redness of his cheeks shows that he is a frequenter of the tavern in Edenton. Besides his stave, he carries a pistol in his belt.

THE NOTARY, a thin, bald-headed little man of about thirty-five, is dressed in the same fashion. But his coat is made of darker cloth and he presents a neater appearance than THE CONSTABLE.

THE MINISTER, a tall cadaverous man of forty or more, with his hair powdered and tied behind, is dressed in the typical clerical garb with black coat, silver-buckled shoes and grey silk hose. His clothes are of finer material and cut than those of the other men.

THE CONSTABLE carries a heavy stave, about six feet long and tipped with iron at the end. THE MINISTER clasps a Bible in his hands. THE NOTARY carries a lantern and a small black hand-bag. The three men stand in surprise a moment. The candle and the fire have somewhat lighted up the room.)

THE NOTARY

(In a high voice)

Ain't as bad in here as I thought it'd be, way out here from town amongst these swamp varmints and cypresses.

THE MINISTER

(Holding his Bible before him, doubtfully)

Is this the habitation of that terrible old man? I should not think this would be the home of witches, though it looks terrible enough outside.

THE CONSTABLE

(Bringing his stave down on the floor and looking around)

'Tis, sir. I thought he'd have the place full of damned old skeletons and such trifles to frighten us with. *(To MUMBO.)* Say, where's your master? Go git him. He sent for us and here we air.

(MUMBO points to the chairs, sits down, then stands up. He points to the rear and back.)

THE NOTARY

(Trying to look comfortable)

He means for us to sit down and wait.

(They take their hats and capes and lay them on chairs at the right.)

THE CONSTABLE

Yes, methinks the old rascal's out there somewhere and'll be back soon.

(He looks around at the furniture with a sort of braggadocio. THE NOTARY glances first at one side of the room and then at the other. THE MINISTER stands as if lost in meditation. THE CONSTABLE brings down his stave on the floor close to THE NOTARY.)

THE NOTARY

(Jumping)

Oh!—— *(He smiles weakly.)* You—you surprised me.

THE CONSTABLE

Take out your tools and let's be ready for business. He'll be in here directly and the sooner we get through, the better it will suit His Majesty's subject.

(He and THE MINISTER go to the fire and warm themselves. THE NOTARY opens the black bag and takes out quill pens, ink-horn and foolscap. THE CONSTABLE and THE MINISTER continue talking.)

THE MINISTER

Well, brother Constable, since this poor sinner has sent for us to hear his confession, I hope we can drive out this witchcraft business that's been troubling the settlers here in Edenton these last few years. Ah, indeed,—*(Raising his eyes)*—I know we can break the spell of the wicked one.

THE CONSTABLE

(Bringing down his stave with a sound which makes

THE NOTARY jump)

Yes, sir. But do you know, sir, this is the way I've been thinking all the time, sir. *(Confidentially.)* I don't believe much in these rumors about witchcraft and evil eyes and such things. And since we're here I might as well say that I didn't come expecting to hear no witchcraft confession. I don't believe he's got anything to confess about his being in league with the devil.

(By this time THE NOTARY has finished laying out his writing materials and stands rubbing his hands. He puts on his spectacles, looks timidly around, sits down, tries his pen and gets up, rubbing his hands.)

THE NOTARY

Well, gentlemen, I am ready to hear the confession.

(He clears his throat.)

THE CONSTABLE

(To THE MINISTER)

No, sir, I believe it's something else he's done he wants to confess, I believe——

(Here the whining voice comes up into the room and dies away. They stand looking at each other, surprised and somewhat afraid.)

THE NOTARY

(Slightly shrinking towards the door at the right and trying to appear at ease)

What's?—what's—that?

THE CONSTABLE

(At first somewhat startled, but regaining his composure)

You wouldn't say you're afraid, would you, Mr. Notary? Ha! Ha! Hee-hee!

THE NOTARY

(Drawing himself up)

Afraid? No, sir, not me! *(He smiles as he buttons and unbuttons his coat.)* But it's so—so very easy to—to be uneasy—on an occasion like this. What you reckon that was?

THE CONSTABLE

Nothing, nothing! Sit down, sit down.

(He takes a seat at the left of the table. THE NOTARY sits at the right. THE MINISTER at the left of THE CONSTABLE. They all face the front.)

THE MINISTER

That must have been the whining of his dog, that noise!

THE CONSTABLE

(A little too eagerly)

Dog! That's it—a dog, Mr. Notary. I knew it was a dog all the while.

(The whining rises again. They all try to appear at ease, but THE MINISTER'S lips move now and then in unconscious prayer, and THE CONSTABLE fingers the butt of his pistol. THE NOTARY squirms in his seat, ever and anon biting his finger nails. The room gradually darkens from here on, as the fire dies down.)

THE MINISTER

What were you saying?

(He takes out a snow-white handkerchief and wipes his brow with a hand that trembles noticeably.)

THE CONSTABLE

(Looking from THE MINISTER to THE NOTARY, who sits rubbing his hands together, now and then smiling and trying to whistle a tune)

It's just what you've heard talked in this town, sir. Some think he made away with his young wife ten year ago when he went across the sea, leastways they say nobody come back with him but that old African slave.

(He jerks his hand to the rear and then glances behind him. Again the whining noise is heard. THE NOTARY gasps once or twice. THE MINISTER'S lips move in prayer. THE CONSTABLE shivers, pulls out a flask from his pocket and takes a dram. He continues his speech, impressively.)

I think he murdered her beyond the water, and that he's going to confess it before he dies——

THE NOTARY

That sounds all right, and he has been ailing, they say.

(The sighing of the wind is heard. The whining continues, and the three sit looking straight before them. THE NOTARY stands up and sits down once or twice.)

THE CONSTABLE

(Looking around)

I wonder where he is.

(MUMBO, unobserved, comes in and sits down at the rear and begins playing his gourd instrument. At the first note the three men bounce out of their seats and turn around.)

THE NOTARY

Oh, Lord, what's that?

THE MINISTER

(Clasping his Bible)

May the Lord defend us from the evil of this habitation! Amen.

THE CONSTABLE

(Jerking out his pistol)

What! Who!—— *(Then he tries to appear at ease.)* Oh, I see, the old African slave! What are you doing here playing for us! *(He starts toward the slave, his steps almost in cadence with MUMBO's dead-march music.)* Well, we don't want no music.

(The whining grows weaker as the playing continues. As THE CONSTABLE approaches MUMBO, THE NOTARY shows plainly that he is afraid. Once or twice he reaches out towards him. THE CONSTABLE continues.) Say, we don't want music. We want the old man. *(He strikes the floor with his stick. MUMBO pays no attention to him.)* Where's your master? We got a little business with him.

(He reaches out to shake MUMBO, when THE NOTARY cries out.)

THE NOTARY

Heigh! Don't——

(THE CONSTABLE jumps as if shot. Then, ashamed of his weakness, he whirls angrily towards THE NOTARY.)

THE CONSTABLE

What in the devil you mean, making such a noise?

THE NOTARY

Oh, I don't like the looks of things. Just look at him there on the floor. He looks like the Devil, I'm scared he'll—— Oh, I don't like the way he's doing.

(The moaning ceases. MUMBO gets up and goes out at the rear.)

THE CONSTABLE

What can he mean by doing that way?

THE MINISTER

(*As THE CONSTABLE walks toward the fire*)

Let's not seek to inquire into these secret things.

Let's do the work of the Lord through faith. (*Piously.*)

No harm can come to us——

(*The wind blows the branches of the cypress trees against the house. THE NOTARY starts at the tapping sound at the window.*)

THE CONSTABLE

Well, well! (*Leaning his head against his hand.*)

It's near time the coach was in from New Bern. And I wonder who's down at the tavern tonight. I know they're having a time there, now, a time!

(*THE NOTARY begins whistling a low tune. THE MINISTER goes to the table and examines the book. THE CONSTABLE goes to the mantel and looks at the swords. By this time the fire has died out, and the room is lighted only by the candle. The three men are nervously moving about. The low whining noise is heard, followed by a scraping sound and the cold rattle of a chain. They look at each other hurriedly, then glance away. THE CONSTABLE speaks in a big voice that at first apparently frightens himself, as he strikes the floor with his stave.*) Heigh! Somebody say something!

THE NOTARY

(*Jumping*)

See here, let's don't stand much more of this.

(*He tries to smile, to whistle, buttoning and unbuttoning his coat.*)

THE MINISTER

(Sitting hurriedly down)

We're doing the Lord's will. He is with us until—the end. Trust in the Lord. Here I sit firm in the faith until we know the secret of this old house and its dreadful master.

THE NOTARY

It's all right to trust in the Lord, but I don't feel right with all this going on——

THE CONSTABLE

Be easy, be easy, Mr. Notary. The old man'll be coming. *(He walks up and down and begins to sing.)*

“And Bessie, me lass, she stood on the down
Awaiting her handsome lover.
Anither came by, and for his sweet eye,
She's gone with the Border Rover.”

(The whining and the scraping sounds are heard again, and then the deep rumbling voice of a man. THE CONSTABLE starts towards the right of the chimney.) Everything's gettin' dark. Where's his firewood, I want some light.

THE NOTARY

Heigh! Don't—don't—they ain't no tellin' what he'll do. We better stay quiet until he comes. He's got the devil's powers. Don't touch his fixings—don't!

THE MINISTER

Brother Notary, don't be afraid. The scriptures say——

THE CONSTABLE

Pardon, sir, but he—(*Jerking his finger towards THE NOTARY*)—seems to be something of a coward.
(*He laughs loudly.*)

THE NOTARY

(*Starting up*)

I'm no coward! No, I ain't—but—but we should 'a' waited till tomorrow. The Governor's issued a warrant for the old man then, and here we've been fools and come out tonight.

THE CONSTABLE

What ails you? Think how they'll honor us in Edenton for coming into this very den of witches. We'll go back tonight knowing the terrible secret of the old man. We will, we will.

THE MINISTER

But these noises and music and wind—all of it is a proof that his poor soul is owned by the devil.

(*They are silent for a moment and then THE CONSTABLE stops in his walk and touches his forehead.*)

THE CONSTABLE

I have just thought of it! The old man's trying to scare us. That's it. That's it! (*Pounding on the*

floor.) Here we are come to listen to his confession and he's trying to scare us first—— He'd have a joke on us, wouldn't he? But he can't scare me, he can't.

(THE MINISTER *looks at him questioningly.*)

THE NOTARY

(*Looking around*)

I was just thinking of the same thing. No, sir, he can't scare us.

(*He sits down with dignity.*)

THE CONSTABLE

I'll show him too. What's to be afraid of! I'm going to rouse things in this house. (*He storms around shouting.*) Heigh! Heigh! Come out, old man! Come out, show yourself!

THE NOTARY

(*Starting up*)

Don't—don't! But I ain't afraid. I say——

(*He stamps about the room.*)

THE CONSTABLE

(*Shouting to the walls*)

Heigh, old man! (*He starts toward the door at the rear.*) What's the matter with this place! Heigh! (*He beats on the floor.*) Wake up—everybody!

THE NOTARY

Ah! Don't do that!

(THE MINISTER *sits in a chair near the fire-place, turning his Bible in his hands, glancing*

here and there as if expecting something to spring at him out of the gloom. Now and then he utters a low prayer. Now he stands up watching THE CONSTABLE who has drawn near the covered idol. Something in the shape of it attracts that bold man's attention. He seems to scent danger, and draws back. THE NOTARY and THE MINISTER inquiringly approach THE CONSTABLE. THE CONSTABLE, reassured by the presence of his two companions, creeps near the idol, his hand on his pistol. The other two are behind him.)

THE NOTARY

(In a low voice)

What's—what's—that?

THE CONSTABLE

I'll find out. Heigh! What do you mean? *(He jerks the cover off the idol.)* Brothers of hell! Damnation! *(THE NOTARY, with a howl of terror, runs and falls behind the table, crying out again and again.)*

THE NOTARY

Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!

THE MINISTER

(Drops his Bible, falls on the floor near the left of the table, wringing his hands and praying fervently in a low voice)

Oh, Lord, remember not our offenses nor the offenses

of our forefathers, neither take thou vengeance on our sins——

(He mumbles over phrases of the Litany.

At first THE CONSTABLE bounds across the room towards the right. Here he whirls and fires point blank at the idol, shattering his head to pieces, just as OLD JULES comes in at the right, supported by MUMBO who closes the door behind him. MUMBO sees the destruction of his idol. He darts across the room, catches THE CONSTABLE by the throat and crushes him to the floor.)

OLD JULES

(In a loud voice)

Mumbo! Mumbo! Come here! Mumbo!

(MUMBO slowly releases the suffocating CONSTABLE who staggers into a chair and sits coughing and gasping. MUMBO comes and falls at the foot of his broken idol, lying motionless with his forehead on the floor. In the meantime THE NOTARY and THE MINISTER have grabbed their capes and hats and are making for the door.)

THE CONSTABLE

(Choking)

Don't—don't leave me here——

(He gasps for breath.)

OLD JULES

(Sitting down in his rocker)

Sit down, gentlemen, I regret this foolishness of Mumbo's. But you have done a serious thing in trying to destroy his god. There is no danger though. Be seated.

THE NOTARY

(To THE CONSTABLE)

Oh, come on! *(He takes up THE CONSTABLE'S hat and cape and moves toward the door.)* Come on! Hurry!

THE CONSTABLE

(Gasping and turning toward THE MINISTER)

Wait, sir, wait——

THE MINISTER

No, it's too late! This house is given over to the evil one.

OLD JULES

Stay!

(He turns and looks at THE NOTARY who has grasped the door latch.)

THE NOTARY

(Dropping the clothes and covering his face with his hands)

Oh, he's got the evil eye! I feel the spell!

(He draws himself almost into a knot and stands by the door shivering.)

OLD JULES

(A look of anger on his massive face)

Fools, fools! Mumbo, Mumbo!

(MUMBO remains motionless. JULES totters to his feet, goes over to MUMBO and brings his cane down on his back several times, calling.) Mumbo, Mumbo! (At the fourth or fifth blow MUMBO springs up with a look of diabolical rage on his face. He makes a move toward JULES, but, under the power of his gaze, he bows his head. JULES speaks with sternness.) Mumbo, lock the door.

THE NOTARY

Oh, Lord!

(He turns the latch and opens the door just as MUMBO catches him by the shoulder and hurls him whimpering into a chair. MUMBO locks the door and then goes back to his crouching position before his idol. The whining notes rise from the rear, followed by a dragging sound. MUMBO stirs uneasily on the floor.)

OLD JULES

(Turning his head towards the rear)

Yes, yes! Soon! Soon! *(The noise ceases. He speaks to the men in a commanding tone.)* Sit down! *(THE NOTARY and THE MINISTER drop into their seats.)* We've only a little time. Nothing can harm you.

THE CONSTABLE

(Who has nearly recovered)

Yes! I believe he's a witch and a murderer too, and we'll take him. He's got us locked in but—
Uh, where you going?

(As THE NOTARY begins creeping stealthily towards the rear, his face working in fright.)

THE NOTARY

I'm going to get out. Oh, Lord, oh, Lord!

OLD JULES

There's no way out there. *(THE NOTARY moves on.)* Mumbo! Mumbo!

THE NOTARY

Oh, Lord, don't call him—rr—rr—rr! I'm coming back—rr—rr!

(He runs and falls into his chair. THE MINISTER recites from the Scriptures under his breath.)

THE MINISTER

(Mumbling)

We humbly beseech thee—mercifully to look upon our infirmities and for the glory of thy name turn from us all those evils that we must justly have deserved—

OLD JULES

(After a moment)

All of you know that I have not always been feeble and hated by the world. Once I was the most influential man in the town there. You have heard that.

Today I am reviled, scorned by the world,—and all by a town I did so much to build. Why? I am accused of being in league with the devil, of being a witch, of causing all the trouble that comes upon the settlement. The children mock me in the streets, crying out when they see me, “Here’s the Old Man of Edenton, come on, let’s chase him,” all because I choose to shut myself up here with my books—all because I have my own sorrows that they know nothing of. (*He stops. The men twist in their chairs.*) I have suffered—suffered—— But I have my reward. To-night will end all—— Fools, fools!

(*He bows his head on his hands. The whispering of the wind is blown across the stage. THE NOTARY twists in his chair.*)

THE NOTARY

(*His voice rising to a high quavering pitch in his fear*)

I ain’t never said nothing—nothing—ag’in’ you—I always told ’em you——

THE CONSTABLE

Hush, you cracked mug!

(*THE MINISTER sits with his hands crossed, praying inaudibly.*)

OLD JULES

Today I learned that the Governor had issued a warrant for my arrest, believing that I had put a spell on his daughter, and that tomorrow you were to come for me. And so I sent for you tonight, since the end

is drawing nigh—drawing nigh—— And after to-night you can tell the world the truth about the Old Man of Edenton. Tell how he suffered, tell how he loved, and how he died. Years ago I was happy here—with my friends, and she—she with her music—until the time came when I had to cross the ocean. And in a far-away country we passed a blind beggar on the road—she gave him alms, and, in giving, she touched his hand—touched his hand—just touched it.

(There is a pause. He shudders. The wind rises and moans around the house.)

THE NOTARY

(Wringing his hands)

Listen at that! Oh, Lord! Listen, will you!

THE MINISTER

Oh, glozing words and sin. For know that for every deed done in the flesh, God shall surely bring thee into judgment——

(The whining noise rises again. OLD JULES raises his head and with a queer look of mingled joy and sorrow calls out.)

OLD JULES

Yes, yes! It's come!

(The sound of shuffling and the clanking of a chain comes up from the rear and draws nearer. JULES continues.) Tonight ends all. I have chosen it rather than to lie in your jails—to be sneered at—and maybe to die at the stake. Fools! Fools! Oh, to be accused

of murdering her, when I would die for one I love—would die for one I love. I love forever and I hate forever. (*The noise beneath the rear of the room ceases. Then a whining sound and scratching against the under side of the floor. He speaks loudly.*) Yes! This ends it all!

(A trapdoor opens near the door at the rear and a creature as white as snow rises up into the room—a creature with nose eaten away, sightless eye-sockets, one sleeve empty, every vestige of eyebrows and hair gone. It is dressed in a long white robe, with a chain tied about its waist, the end of which drags on the floor. The creature stands silent except for a humming sound that comes from its throat. MUMBO'S body jerks convulsively on the floor. The three men start up in terror.)

THE NOTARY

(Breaking away)

Father of Heaven. Look! What is that!

THE CONSTABLE

What! Look!

(He curses softly under his breath. THE MINISTER picks up his Bible and clutches it to his breast.)

OLD JULES

There is nothing to fear—— For ten years she has stayed shut up down there, chained to keep her from

killing herself—— For ten years she has begged me to kill her. For ten years she has not touched the spinet there she loved so well—and tonight she will play it—tonight ends all. (*He addresses the creature.*) Yes, yes!

(*She begins to feel her way over to the spinet.*
THE NOTARY grasps his cape and holds it over his face.)

THE MINISTER

From all evil and mischief, from sin, the crafts and assaults of the devil, from thy wrath, and from everlasting damnation, Good Lord, deliver us!——

OLD JULES

(*Reaching up and taking the glass from the mantel*)
Mumbo! Mumbo! Open the door!

THE NOTARY

(*Running to the door at the right and beating on it*)
Let us out! Let us out!

OLD JULES

(*More loudly*)

Mumbo! The key! Open the door! The fire!
(*With a shriek of fiendish delight MUMBO springs to his feet and darts out the door at the rear. The three men crouch in terror on the floor. OLD JULES drinks the contents of the glass.*) Go and tell your people that the Old Man of Edenton, because he loved, because he loved, lived ten years with a leper wife——

THE CONSTABLE

God in heaven! Leprosy!

(He runs towards the door at the right, knocking over the table and extinguishing the candle. The room at once is left in a deep gloom. The figures of the men crawling on the floor can only be seen indistinctly. All three claw at the side door. MUMBO stands in the door at the rear looking on the scene with gibberings of delight, as the fire lights up the room with a lurid effect.)

OLD JULES

(Calling feebly)

The key! Mumbo! The key! Open the door!
Let them go! It's dark—dark——

(MUMBO grins and gibbers. The roaring fire can be seen mounting higher and higher in the hallway. OLD JULES turns toward MUMBO and pants weakly.)

Let them out——

(MUMBO only laughs a noiseless laugh. He tears the key from his belt and hurls it into the raging fire. OLD JULES makes an effort to rise and falls back dead. The leper has at last found the spinet. She sits down and opens it with one awful hand. The men on the floor are in abject terror, THE NOTARY weeping, THE MINISTER praying, THE CONSTABLE cursing. MUMBO remains standing in the door grinding his teeth until the curling flames begin biting at his back. And as they begin to lick

around the lintels of the door, he throws himself headlong on the floor before his god.

Above the low moaning of the men on the floor and the sound of the wind and the fire, clear and sweet rises the tinkle, tinkle of the spinet.)

CURTAIN

THE LAST OF THE LOWRIES¹

*A Play of the Croatan Outlaws of Robeson County,
North Carolina.*

BY

PAUL GREENE

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THE LAST OF THE LOWRIES

CAST OF CHARACTERS

As originally produced at The Play-House, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, April 30 and May 1, 1920.

CUMBA LOWRIE, *the aged mother of the Lowries,*
Elizabeth Taylor

JANE, *her daughter,* Ruth Penny

MAYNO, *Cumba's daughter-in-law,* Rachel Freeman

HENRY BERRY LOWRIE, *last of the outlaw gang,*
Ernest Nieman

SCENE: The rough home of the Lowrie gang in
Scuffletown, a swampy region of Robeson County,
North Carolina.

TIME: A night in the winter of the year 1874.



Scene from *The Last of the Lowries*. HENRY BERRY LOWRIE (Ernest Neiman) and JANE (Ruth Penny)
JANE: "Will they git you to-night?"

SCENE

THE kitchen of the Lowrie home.

The interior is that of a rude dwelling built of rough-hewn timbers. At the right front is a fireplace in which a fire is burning. Pots and pans are hung around the fireplace. A rocking chair is drawn up in front of the fire. At the right rear is a cupboard. At the centre rear a door leads outside. Above it are several fishing poles and a net resting on pegs fitted into the joists. To the rear at the left is a loom with a piece of half-finished cloth in it. A door in the centre of the left wall leads into an adjoining room. To the right of it is a window. At the front on that side is a chest. In the centre of the room is a rough, oblong eating-table and several home-made chairs with cowhide bottoms. A spinning-wheel stands at the front left. On the table is an unlighted candle in a tin holder.

The play opens with MAYNO LOWRIE spinning at the wheel. She stops, folds her hands aimlessly across her lap, and stares idly into the fire. She is a full-blooded Croatan, about twenty-five years old, of medium height with skin a tan color, almost copper, prominent cheek bones, short flat nose, and black shifty eyes. Her coarse raven hair is wound into a knot at the back of her head. She is dressed in a polka-dot calico. Her shoes are somewhat heavy but comfortable

looking. Around her neck she wears a string of shiny glass beads. Several cheap rings adorn her hands.

For a moment she sits idle, and then begins to spin lazily, at almost every revolution of the wheel stopping to glance at the rear door, then at the door to the left, as if expecting someone to enter. She listens. From afar off comes the lone hoot of an owl. She shakes her head and starts the wheel going again. Then she goes to the fireplace, turns the bread in the spider and with a long-handled spoon stirs the peas in the pot. After this she goes back to her chair at the wheel.

Three knocks are heard at the rear door. MAYNO hurries to remove the bar. JANE LOWRIE enters with a bundle under her arm. She throws the bundle on the table, takes off her bonnet and cape and hangs them on a peg near the door at the left. MAYNO goes to the bundle, stares at it half curiously and fearfully. JANE comes to the fire without speaking. She is a tall Croatan girl, dressed more plainly than MAYNO in a dress of homespun, with no ornaments. Her shoes are covered with mud. She is about twenty years old, with heavy black hair, light tan-colored skin, and regular features. Her face is more open and intelligent than MAYNO's. Her whole figure expresses weariness. She looks anxiously at the door of the adjoining room, then turns to MAYNO.

JANE

Has she asked for me?

MAYNO

Not but once. I tol' her you'd stepped over to

Pate's for a little flour, and she seemed to pearten up at that. Said mebbe they'd be a letter from the boys 'way yander.

(She smiles scornfully. Still standing at the table, she looks at the package. CUMBA'S voice is heard calling from the room at the left.)

CUMBA

Jane, Jane, is that ye?

JANE

(Going to the door at the left)

Yes, muh, I'm jes' back from Pate's with the flour.

CUMBA

All right, honey.

(JANE goes into the room. Their voices can be heard indistinctly. MAYNO looks at the package, reaches and touches it. Then she tears a hole in the paper, peers at it intently and draws away. JANE comes back.)

JANE

Mayno, they're . . . his'n!

MAYNO

Whose? . . . Yes, they must be his'n.

JANE

(Lighting a candle and placing it on the table)

Yes, Mayno, they's Steve's all right.

MAYNO

How'd you git 'em, chile?

JANE

I got 'em from the sheriff.

MAYNO

And I thought you were goin' to see Henry Berry 'bout Steve's money and find where they put 'im.

(She opens the package and takes out a coat, a pair of trousers, and a black felt hat. The garments are slashed and stiff with blood.)

JANE

I did—two hours proguing down through the black swamps an' the bramble br'ars, and when I foun' Henry Berry he said them sher'ffs what killed Steve got his money, and as for where they put 'im, nobody knows. *(CUMBA is heard groaning as she turns in her bed. JANE lowers her voice.)* And then I went to the sheriff for his clothes. I knowed that some day when she—*(Nodding to the room at the left)*—finds it out she'll be wantin' his clothes, them she made with her own hands like th' others. And the sheriff wouldn't tell me where they buried 'im.

MAYNO

Took his money, did they? That's the way with them white folks. They do all they kin agin' us poor Croatons, 'cause we's jes' injuns, they says—though we knows better.

JANE

They don't hold nothin' agin' us; hit's agin' the boys.

MAYNO

They killed yo' daddy and William and Tom and Steve for being robbers and cut-throats and they robbers and cut-throats theyselves. (*Fiercely.*) And me needing new dresses and the like. But they's one left they won't git, the last an' best of 'em all. The day they lays Henry Berry cold they'll be more of 'em got than has been.

JANE

(*Wearily*)

Hush, Mayno; with your jawing you'd wake the dead. She'll hear you.

MAYNO

(*Throwing down the clothes and coming to the fire*)

Well, why you want to keep pushing trouble from her? What's the good o' it? She'll find it out somehow. She's suffered now 'til you cain't hurt her no more. And ain't I suffered too, with my man dead on me? What call has she got to . . .

JANE

No, we ain't a-goin' to tell her now. She ain't got much longer, and let her keep on b'lieving Steve and Henry Berry's safe in Georgy. No, they ain't no use o' letting her on to it now.

(*JANE sits at the spinning-wheel.*)

MAYNO

(Vehemently)

Ain't Henry Berry going to *try* to git them sher'ffs back for killing Steve? If I's a outlaw like him I'd a done paid 'em. And he'll pay 'em, too! He's the best o' the Lowries and he'll 'venge them that's been murdered in cold blood like Steve and the rest.

JANE

No, Mayno, he won't nuther. His time's drawin' nigh. He knows it. They're settin' for him everywhere. They's men watchin' this house to-night. I seen it in his face to-day that he's layin' down. He was wrong from the first. He knows it now.

MAYNO

What's that!

JANE

Yes, he's a-quittin', but if them sheriffs hadn't agged him on ten years ago when he wanted to quit and be quiet he'd a been livin' in peace here to-night. But it's too late now. Too many men's been killed. And he's putting up his guns at the last. They'll git him 'fore many days. . . . He tol' me so.

MAYNO

You're a-lyin', gal. You know he's goin' to bring 'em down for Steve, him as was the strappingest man o' the gang. It ain't his way to be a-backing down and not pay 'em.

JANE

No, he ain't. He's a-puttin' it by, I tell you. They'll ketch him 'fore long.

MAYNO

Then what you goin' to do 'bout her in there? You cain't keep on a-foolin' her forever with your letters and money and mess from Georgy.

JANE

Well, we c'n fool 'er till she gits better, cain't we? And if she don't git better, then she'll go out happier, won't she . . . believin' Steve and Henry Berry's safe and livin' as they ought—(*She rises and goes to the cupboard*)—she so old and fearful at the door hinge skreaking even and the red rooster crowing 'fore the glim o' dawn, you know, Mayno.

(*She brings some butter and the molasses pot from the cupboard, takes the spider from the fire and puts supper on the table.*)

MAYNO

Well, go on if you will, but you cain't keep it up much longer. It'll be jes' like I said. Henry Berry'll come broozin' around some night. Sposen so?

JANE

(*Frightened*)

You reckon he'd do that. . . . No he couldn't. I tol' him about how it was with her, and besides he knows the house is watched.

MAYNO

(Shaking her head)

I dunno. He mought. You know the time he slipped through a whole passel o' them sher'ffs jes' to come here and git a shirt she'd made 'im? And by this time he must be a-wantin' to see her powerful bad.

JANE

(Terrified)

You reckon he will? No, he won't! He couldn't do that. *(Old CUMBA is heard calling JANE.)* Put them things in the sack with th' others, Mayno, and put 'em in the bottom, too. You c'n be fixin' her supper while I ten' to 'er. *(She goes into the rear room. MAYNO takes up the clothes, opens the chest at the left, pulls out a bulky burlap sack and crams the trousers, shirt and hat into it. Shutting the chest, she goes to the cupboard, takes out three plates and some knives and forks and lays them on the table. Then she begins preparing CUMBA's supper on a plate. JANE comes to the door and speaks.)* You needn't bring her supper in here, Mayno, she's going to git up, she says. *(JANE goes back into the room. MAYNO shrugs her shoulders, sits down and begins to eat. JANE comes in supporting old CUMBA. She speaks to MAYNO.)* Fix her chair by the fire, Mayno.

MAYNO

(Rising reluctantly from the table)

Gimme time, cain't you?

(She pulls CUMBA's chair nearer to the fire.)

CUMBA is a bent, emaciated old woman, about seventy years of age. Her face is scarred with suffering. She is a mixture of Negro and Portuguese, somewhat darker than JANE. She is feeble and shakes with palsy.)

CUMBA

(Pausing, as JANE leads her to the fire)

Did you say they warn't nary letter from the boys
'way out thar?

JANE

(Looking at MAYNO as she settles CUMBA in her chair)

No'm, there warn't no letter this time, but they'll be one soon. You see they cain't write often, not yit. They mought be ketched on account of it. 'Tain't quite time for another'n yit.

CUMBA

Mebbe so, mebbe so. But I thought they mought 'a been one. How long is it they been out thar, chile?

JANE

(Placing the plate of food on her lap)

Two months now, muh. And they's livin' straight and 'spectable, too. And 'twon't be long 'fore the big Governor'll pardon 'em, and they'll come back to you, and you'll be happy agin, you will that.

CUMBA

(Brightening)

And I'll be at the loom then, a-weavin' 'em the good shirts, won't I? And they'll be working in the fields and comin' home to a good dinner, won't they? And at night Henry Berry'll be a-playin' of his banjo like old times, won't he? *(She stops suddenly. All the brightness goes out of her face. She lets her knife fall to her plate.)* But they won't be but two of 'em, will there, Janie? Jes' two. When thar was Allen, my old man—they shot 'im over thar in the corner. *(She turns and points.)* They's a blood spot thar now. Then thar was Willie and Tom. And they ain't no tellin' how they put 'im away, chile . . . chile . . .

JANE

Now, muh, you mustn't do that!—Eat your supper. You got to git well, time Steve and Henry Berry gits back. They's allus grief with the children going, but you still got two of the boys and me.

(JANE butters a piece of bread and hands it to her.)

CUMBA

Mebbe so, mebbe so, chile. But . . . *(She stops.)* Whar's that letter that come from the boys last month? I wants it read agin.

JANE

But, muh, you got to eat. I'll read it after while. Let me fry you a egg.

(MAYNO leaves the table and begins spinning at the wheel.)

CUMBA

I ain't hongry, chile. Take them thar rations and put 'em back and read me the letter. It's enough to hear it . . . hearin' that the last of my boys is safe and ca'm and livin' once more as I'd lak 'em to.

JANE

Well, I'll git it then.

(She goes, searches in the cupboard, and at last draws out a greasy envelope. From this she takes a sheet of paper and comes back to old CUMBA.)

CUMBA

Read it, honey. It's the blessin' of the Lord that I's spared to learn that two o' my boys is shet of sin. But they's been a heap o' blood spilt, chile, a heap o' blood spilt . . . but they's been more tears spilt by they ol' mammy, too, and mebbe at last they'll ketch a chance to come back to her. Read it, chile.

JANE

(Glancing at MAYNO and then looking at the letter)

They says they's a-gitting along well and makin' money an' . . .

CUMBA

Don't read it like that. Read what they says!

JANE

Well, I'll read it then.

(She reads.)

"Dear Mammy:

"We writes to let you know we're in Georgy at last, safe an' sound. We're both workin' in a store an' makin' good money. They ain't nobody knows what we done back there, an' the people is good to us. 'Twon't be long 'fore the Governor'll pardon us, and we can come back and take care o' you.

"Your lovind sons,

"Steve and Henry Berry."

CUMBA

You left out somethin', child. Don't you know they sent some money with the letter and they spoke about it.

JANE

(*Confused*)

Yes'm, that's right. I forgot it. It's on the other side, mammy. Yes'm, here it is. It says, "We're sendin' you twenty dollars to buy meat and flour with."

CUMBA

Good boys they is, they ain't never meant no harm. Willie and Tom was jes' that-a-way. Every cent they used to make a-hoein' cotton 'roun' they'd give it to they ol' mammy, an' the good Lord knows whar they's sleepin' to-night . . . but they's two spared me an' I hadn't ought to complain, I reckon. Is the money all gone, Janie?

JANE

No'm, there's some left yit, and they'll be sending more in the next letter.

(She puts the letter back into the cupboard and begins cleaning up the dishes. Old CUMBA leans back in her chair, gazing into the fire. The hooting of an owl is heard. She stirs uneasily in her chair. MAYNO and JANE stop their work and listen. They both look at each other and then glance at old CUMBA, who is trembling and gripping the arms of her chair. JANE begins to rattle the dishes. MAYNO spins rapidly.)

CUMBA

(Turning to JANE)

Ain't that a owl squeechin', Jane?

JANE

(Looking at MAYNO)

What? . . . I . . . I don't hear nothin'.

(The hooting is heard again.)

CUMBA

Ain't that it agin?

MAYNO

Aw, it's nothin' but that ol' swamp owl. He hollers 'most every night. Don't take on 'bout it.

(She shivers and stirs the fire.)

CUMBA

(Shrilly)

It sounds like some o' my boys a-makin' o' they signals down thar in the night; but 'tain't them though.

The only two that's left is a long ways off, and mebbe won't never come back.

JANE

Now, they will too.

CUMBA

'Way back yonder I loved to see 'em 'round me here, the warm fire a-burnin' and Allen thar a-working at his gear, and them that was little uns then a-playing on the floor. I didn't mind it them times. (*Her voice grows shriller.*) And now where are they? My ol' man and all the house gone from me.

MAYNO

Aw, Ma Lowrie, what's the use of all them carry-ing-ons? You reckon you're the only one that's had trouble in this world?

CUMBA

And when the rain and the wind come raring down and the cypress trees is moanin' in the dark and the owls a-honing through the night, I think on them three lyin' dead thar in the woods and the water washin' over them, and me with nothin' but their clothes to remember on and show for them I was prided for.

(*Again the hooting of the owl is heard. JANE leaves the dishes suddenly and comes to the fire, lays more wood on, furtively wiping the tears from her eyes. CUMBA still looks in the fire.*)

JANE

It's time for you to lay down now.

CUMBA

(Without noticing her)

At times in the dark night I dream on 'em and they ain't nothin' happened and it's all like it used to be, and then I wake a-callin', and they don't answer, for they're sleepin' out naked in the cold.

MAYNO

(Shrugging her shoulders)

Jes' listen at her!—Ma Lowrie, cain't you be quiet a bit? *(Lowering her voice.)* Lord, you're as techous as a' old hen!

JANE

(Half sobbing)

What makes you carry on like that? It cain't do no good. Ain't Henry Berry tol' you a hundred times that he's buried all three of 'em down thar in the swamp. And he's skeered to tell the place for fear them sher'ffs'll dig 'em up and git the money for 'em. Don't take on so. They's put away with praying, and you'd better lie down now.

(She looks at MAYNO.)

CUMBA

Yes, they mought be buried in the swamp down thar, and when it rains the river rises and washes over 'em, them that used to pull at my dress when I was at the wash— But Old Master sends the sun and the rain, and the Book says we ought to be satisfied. *(The owl's*

hoot is heard again. CUMBA looks at the door and shivers.) Help me in now, chile. I didn't mean to say all that, but I'm done. An' ol' woman's heart is a foolish thing . . . a foolish thing. . . .

(JANE helps her into the room at the left. A moment later she reappears. She looks at MAYNO inquisitively.)

MAYNO

Sounded like Henry Berry's hootin', didn't it?

JANE

Yes, I'm afraid it's him, after all I tol' him. Oh, what makes him do it? But it's like I said. He's givin' in now, he's quittin' at the last. And he's set on seein' her once more or it's some of his quair notions, somethin' he's wropped up in gittin'.

(Three knocks are heard at the door. JANE runs and lifts the heavy bar, and HENRY BERRY LOWRIE walks in.)

MAYNO

Henry Berry!

(He starts to speak but JANE lays her finger on her lips and leads him towards the fire. He takes off his hat and bows wearily to MAYNO.)

He is a man of handsome personal appearance. The color of his skin is a mixed white and yellowish brown, almost copper-colored. Just below his left eye is a crescent-shaped scar. Despite the look of weariness, his countenance is

expressive in a high degree of firmness and courage. His forehead is broad and high, his eyes large and keen, his hair thick and inclined to curl. He wears a black beard. From appearances he is about twenty-six years of age, a little above medium height, well-knit, broad-shouldered, and well-proportioned throughout. He wears a broad, black felt hat, brown corduroy coat, dark woolen trousers, and calf-skin boots. In a belt around his waist he carries two pistols. From this belt a strap passes upward and supports a repeating rifle behind. He also carries a long-bladed knife stuck in his belt. He takes a seat at the fire, putting his rifle in the corner, but retaining his other arms. JANE runs to the door at the rear and makes sure that it is closed tight. Then she hurries to HENRY BERRY.

JANE

Brother, what made you do it! The house is watched an' . . .

HENRY BERRY

I know it, Sis, but I had to come. I'm quittin' . . . to-night. Is she asleep?

(He jerks his head towards the room at the left.)

JANE

No, I've jes' helped her in. That's the reason we couldn't make no sign with the light.

HENRY BERRY

I couldn't figure what the trouble was. I hooted 'til my head hurt. But I was goin' to risk it anyhow.

JANE

What'll she think if she sees you! Oh, hurry and go away!

HENRY BERRY

Naw, I got to see her. After to-night 'twon't matter. Bring me a bite to eat, Sis. How is she?

MAYNO

I reckon she's on the mend. . . .

JANE

(Frightened)

Will they git you to-night? What do you mean by sich talk?

HENRY BERRY

Never mind. They'll git me . . . when I'm dead, all right, no doubt o' that. I'm taking the gear off at last. The ol' man's gone, Willie and Tom's gone, and they got Steve last week, and I'm the last o' the gang. I'm tired, damned tired of it all, Sis.

JANE

But I tell you, you cain't give up like that. You got to keep on fightin' till you git a chance to git away!

HENRY BERRY

Naw, it's too late now. If they'd 'a let me, I'd 'a

lived straight, but after the first trouble I had to keep killin' to live. Well, I'm done killin', now . . . 'cept one man, and they ain't no use of you knowin' who it is. You'll know soon enough. One man can't stand i' allus, and they'll scrush him at the last.

(JANE sits in her chair weeping softly. HENRY BERRY lays his hand gently on her head. Trying to appear cheerful, he turns to MAYNO.)

Mayno, bring me a bite to eat.

(He sits at the table, facing the front. MAYNO gets a plate of food and puts it before him. He eats hungrily.)

MAYNO

Whar'd they put 'im, Henry Berry?

HENRY BERRY

I ain't been able to find out, Mayno. Piled him in some of their rotten graveyards, I reckon, when he loved to run the woods with th' other wild things like him.

MAYNO

What'd they do with his money?

HENRY BERRY

I dunno. Got that, too, I reckon. But you needn't to worry. Jane! (JANE looks up.) Here, I've fixed for you-all. Here's money enough to last you three after I'm gone.

(He stops eating and pulls a bag of money out of his pocket.)

JANE

But, brother . . .

HENRY BERRY

Never mind, take it and take care o' her. It's the last thing I c'n do for her and you. g

JANE

But she won't use it, knowin' how you come by it.

HENRY BERRY

She won't?

JANE

No, she won't. She'll starve first, and you know it. You know all them fixin's you sent her. She give 'em all away, the stove and the stool with three legs and everything. And when she thought you and Steve was livin' straight in Georgy, she give away that gold chain you brung her. She's feared you hadn't got it honest.

HENRY BERRY

(Softly)

Yes, yes, she's allus been too good fer us. *(He leaves the table and takes a seat near the fire.)* Still that chain was bought honest. . . . But you three's got to live, ain't ye? Take that money, and don't tell 'er. *(JANE puts the money in the chest.)* Mayno, is my ol' banjo still here?

MAYNO

Yeah, in thar.

HENRY BERRY

I been wantin' to knock her a little for a long time.
And I want to knock her a little the las' night.

JANE

The las' night! It ain't the las' night! If you'd
go now you'd git away. Why do you talk like that?

*(She is interrupted by a loud cry. Old CUMBA
stands in the door at the rear.)*

CUMBA

It's you, it's you, Henry Berry! Come back from
Georgy. I knowed you'd come. I knowed. . . .
*(She totters to HENRY BERRY and throws her arms
around him. He kisses her on the forehead. Her look
is one of unmingled joy. Suddenly the hurt look comes
back into her face.)* Why you come back a-wearin' of
your guns?

HENRY BERRY

(Helping her to the fire)

I'm just wearin' 'em. I didn't want to be ketched
empty. I'm leavin' in a few minutes and le's us enjoy
ourselves, and forgit about Georgy.

CUMBA

No, they's somethin' wrong. Whar's Steve?

HENRY BERRY

(Looking at MAYNO and JANE)

He's waitin' for me . . . out thar.

(He points toward the swamp.)

CUMBA

Why didn't he come in wid you? Is he well and strong? How I'd love to see 'im!

HENRY BERRY

One of us had to wait for th' other'n, and he's all right. How you feelin', mammy? Is your haid better now?

CUMBA

Yes, I'm gittin' better now. I wants to git well time you and Steve comes home for good. (*Stroking his hand.*) Has the Gov'nor pardoned ye already?

HENRY BERRY

No, mammy, not jest yit. But it'll be all right soon. . . . Steve and me's jest passin' through. . . . Now le's us enjoy ourselves. I got to be movin' in a minute. Steve's waiting for me. . . . Mebbe we'll talk about Georgy some other time. . . . Mayno, bring me my ol' music box.

CUMBA

Yes, yes, git it and let 'im play for me.

(MAYNO *brings the banjo from the next room.*

HENRY BERRY *tunes it.* CUMBA *sits gazing in the fire, a troubled look on her face.*)

HENRY BERRY

You want me to play 'bout Job's Coffin hanging in the sky? (*Strangely.*) That was Steve's piece.

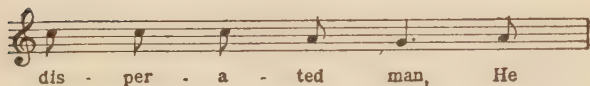
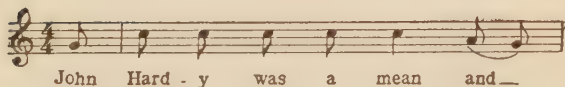
JANE
(*Nervously*)

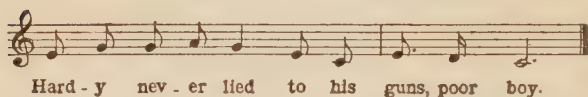
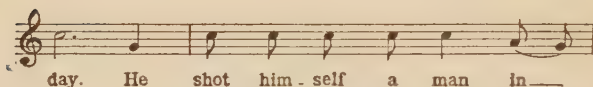
Don't, don't play that. It's too lonesome.
(*She shivers.*)

HENRY BERRY
What piece you want me to play?
(*To CUMBA. She makes no reply. HENRY BERRY looks at her. He strums several bars, his face gradually losing its tense expression.*)
What you want me to play, muh?

CUMBA
Play anything. Some o' the ol' pieces.

HENRY BERRY
I'll play that piece 'bout poor John Hardy.
(*He plays and sings three stanzas of the ballad "John Hardy."*)





He's been to the east and he's been to the west
 And he's been this wide world round,
 He's been to the river an' been baptized,
 An' he's been on his hanging ground, poor boy.

John Hardy's father was standing by,
 Saying, "Johnnie, what have you done?"
 He murdered a man in the same ol' town,
 You ought a-seed him a-using of his guns, poor boy.
(He stops and gazes pensively before him.)

CUMBA

(Looking anxiously at HENRY BERRY)

What's the matter, son? You don't play it like you
 used to.

HENRY BERRY

It ain't nothing. I'll play yo' other piece now, that
Florelly song.

CUMBA

Yes, play it. Allen allus said 'twas a good piece.

HENRY BERRY

The Fair Florella

An Old Ballad



Down by yon weep - ing wil - low,



Where ros - es so sweet - ly bloom,



There sleeps the fair Flo - rel - la,



So si - lent in — the tomb.

She died not broken hearted,
No sickness her befell,
But in one moment parted
From all she loved so well.

Down on her knees before him,
She begged 'im for her life,
But deep into her bosom
He plunged the fatal knife.

(Before the last verse ends, owl hoots are heard outside. HENRY BERRY stops, listening. The banjo slips through his hands to the floor. All three look at him questioningly.)

CUMBA

What is it, boy? Don't look that-a-way.

(Again the hooting of an owl is heard. HENRY BERRY rises to his feet, takes his rifle from the chimney corner and stands an instant tensely silent. Slowly his defensive attitude changes to one of despair. They watch him anxiously as he comes back to his former place in the room, looks down at his banjo, makes a move as if to pick it up, then turns to CUMBA.)

HENRY BERRY

Well, I'm goin'. I've sorto' tried to be a fitten boy to you, but I reckon I made poor outs at it.

(He bends and kisses her. She rises and clings to him.)

CUMBA

You ain't a-goin' air ye? It'll be for the las' time and I know it.

HENRY BERRY

Yes'm, I got to go. Didn't you hear Steve's signal? He's a-waitin'.

(Making an indefinite motion with his hand toward the swamp, he loosens her hold, kisses JANE and makes a sign for MAYNO to follow him. They both go out. CUMBA wrings her hands and follows him toward the door. Then she becomes calm.)

CUMBA

Let him go off now, an' I'll never see 'im agin. His sperit's broke and he won't be a-goin' back to Georgy. I see it in his face that he's quittin' it all.

JANE

No'm he ain't, he's a-goin' straight back. . . . He and Steve is.

CUMBA

No, he ain't a-goin' back. Cain't I see what's in his face? They'll git 'im and 'twon't be long, and then Steve'll be shot down next, and there'll be only a handful o' their clothes for me to look at. (JANE weeps silently.) Whar's Mayno?

JANE

She's jes' stepped out a minute. She'll be back.

CUMBA

Yes, and I know, they're goin' to git 'im. They's a-setting for him thar in the black night.

JANE

No'm, they ain't, I tell you. They'll never git Henry Berry. (OLD CUMBA *shakes her head mumbling. She goes to the chest at the left and takes out the burlap bag. The lid of the chest falls. JANE starts up.*) Put it back, put it back. You mustn't look at 'em to-night. Come back to the fire.

(*She tries to take the bag from her.*)

CUMBA

No, chil', I ain't. I'm goin' to look at all that's left of 'em.

JANE

Let 'em be!

CUMBA

(*Waving her off*)

No, git away. Soon Henry Berry's 'll be in there, too. (*She stops and looks at the bag.*) Janie, who's been foolin' wi' this? What's . . .

(*She hurries to the table and holding the sack close to the candle, opens it. She catches hold of a coat sleeve and draws out Steve's coat. A gasping dry sound comes from her throat. She drops the bag and holds the coat in her trembling hands.*)

It's Steve's! How come it here? It's Steve's!—one I made 'im myself.

JANE

Oh, muh, let . . . What ails you?

CUMBA

I s'picioned it! And they been foolin' me.

JANE

(Hopelessly)

Yes'm, it's Steve's.

(CUMBA sways to and fro.)

CUMBA

You been foolin' me! You been foolin' me! *(She stands rigid for a moment, then speaks in a hard, lifeless voice.)* It warn't right to fool me like that. . . . When'd it happen?

JANE

Las' week. . . . They got 'im down on the big road by the swamp, an' . . .

CUMBA

Hush! Don't tell me 'bout it. I'm afflicted and defeated enough now. They's only one left and they'll git 'im soon. . . . Did they put Steve away like a man?

JANE

I dunno. The sheriff give 'is clothes to me.

(A shot is heard in the distance, followed by a woman's scream.)

CUMBA

(Starting up and speaking in a shrill voice)

They got 'im now! They got 'im now! The last un's gone!

(She tries to go out at the door. JANE stops her.)

JANE

(Catching her by the arm)

Don't do that!

(CUMBA goes back to the sack, picks up STEVE's coat and stares at it dully.)

CUMBA

They tuck 'em all now. They tuck 'em all.

JANE

Muh, it had to come. An' it's better that-a-way.

CUMBA

(Dully)

Better that-a-way?

JANE

Yes, it's better like that. They was wrong from the jump.

CUMBA

Wrong! My boys was good boys. They ain't never . . . *(Raising her hands above her head, she speaks fiercely.)* May Ol' Master send his fires on them that done it! An' . . .

JANE

(Sobbing)

Oh, why'd they do it!

CUMBA

No. It says as how we'd ought to love 'em 'at does us wrong.

(She closes her eyes, swaying slightly from side to side.)

JANE

Let me help you to lie down now!

CUMBA

Yes, it's better that-a-way, I reckon. *(Her face shows resignation to sorrow. She speaks with a sort of joy in her voice.)* An' I won't be livin' in hope and fear no mo', will I? *(Slowly.)* And when the owls hoot through the swamp at night, and the whippoor-wills sing in the thicket at dark, I won't have cause to think that's one o' my own a-givin' of 'is signals, an' tryin' to slip back to 'is ol' home, the only place he loves, —will I? *(She drops down into the chair behind the table.)* An' I won't lie awake at night, thinkin' they're in danger . . . for He's done give 'em His peace at last.

(MAYNO enters running. Old CUMBA stands up.)

MAYNO

He shot 'isself. He shot 'isself! He give me this coat to give to you, an' then the sheriffs crope from the

thicket at 'im, but he shot 'isself 'fore they got to 'im, and they tuck 'im and toted 'im off!

(She drops into her chair exhausted, rocking to and fro. Old CUMBA takes the coat from her, looks at it, and then puts it in the sack. She puts STEVE'S coat in also and stands looking down at the bag.)

CUMBA

Thar's all that's left o' them I loved . . . a bundle o' clothes to show for my man an' four grown sons. *(She stops an instant.)* And you'll all sleep quiet at the last. *(She stands a moment silent, then shrilly.)* But they're all gone, and what call hev I got to be living more. . . .

(She raises her hand as if in a curse. But her face softens, and as the curtain falls, she stands with both hands outstretched on the clothes, blessing them.)



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